Identity Development of Somali College Students

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Dedication

This dissertation project is dedicated to all my wonderful teachers past and present. They taught and guided me with patience and compassion.

Abstract

While there has been a considerable research on college students' experiences and identity development, there is a gap in the literature on immigrant college students and their collegiate experiences. This scarcity of knowledge on immigrant students has deleterious effects on these students' academic success and psychosocial wellbeing. This is particularly critical at a time when these students face multiple and intersecting marginalizations because of their racial, ethnic, religious identities.

This dissertation examines the identity development of Somali college students and how it's impacted by the overlapping contextual environments in which their lives are embedded. The dissertation project uses qualitative methods. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews and grounded theory constructivist methodology, data collection and analyses were conducted in tandem. Findings suggest the presence of four salient dimensions of racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms as well as meanings associated with each dimension. Racial identity was associated with experiences of political subjectivities as Blacks struggling for equality in a racialized society whereas ethnic identity was associated solidarity and belonging informed by diasporic experiences of longing and memories of participants' ancestral homeland, Somalia. Religious identity, owing to racialization of Islam in media and society, was associated with experiences that mirrored their racial identity while gender identity was associated sense of individual agency that challenged gender norms in Somali culture. These four dimensions of identity often intersected in ways that either amplified or erased an aspect of identity. In each of these dimensions, participants

contrasted their experiences as second-generation immigrants with those of their first-generation parents.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

American higher education institutions are expected to educate increasingly diverse students and prepare the next generation of the skilled workforce and engaged citizens imbued with an entrepreneurial spirit and ideals of democracy (Gurin et al., 2002). It is from this understanding that President Obama launched an ambitious policy to make America produce the highest proportion of college and university graduates in the world, saying, "Now is the time to build a firmer, stronger foundation for growth that will not only withstand future economic storms, but one that helps us thrive and compete in a global economy." (White House, 2009). To achieve this goal, colleges and universities must create environments conducive to both students' academic success and social development. Creating these institutional conditions demands an understanding of the experiences of today's diverse college students and how campus experiences affect their development as scholars and young adults (Rumbaut, 1994).

President Obama's call for more college graduates came at a time when the country was experiencing a sharp rise in immigration. This surge resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of immigrants in the nation's higher education institutions (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Although the exact number of immigrant students in higher education institutions is unavailable, data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08) indicates that about 25 percent of undergraduate college students were immigrants during the 2007-2008 academic year. NPSAS's definition of the term immigrant includes naturalized or permanent residents who are foreign-born students, and second-generation immigrant

students with at least one foreign-born parent. This means that about one in four undergraduate students was either a first or second-generation immigrant (Wei et al., 2009). This upward trend in in higher education will continue as the number of immigrant students in the school population rises. Demographers predicted that by 2015, close to 30 percent of school students will be immigrants, and within a few years, this population will be matriculating to postsecondary options (Fix & Passel, 2003).

Immigrant and refugee college students face myriad complex historical and cultural challenges that negatively impact their ability to form a firm sense of identity in a multicultural society (Fix & Passel, 2003). As Erikson noted in his seminal study on the development of young adults, traditional undergraduate education coincides with the stage of life when young adults explore and develop a sense of who they are as individuals (Erikson, 1968, p. 190). At the same time, it also introduces students to different ideas that inform, challenge and reinforce their notions of self and their place in society (Hurtado, 2003). Triggered by college experiences, this heightened awareness about one's identity tends to be more pronounced for underrepresented students like immigrants who have to reconstruct their sense of self in a college campus climate that is likely to be both hostile and exclusionary (McEwen et al., 1990; Sedlacek, 1987). The hostilities and marginalization that immigrant students face even in normal times is further exacerbated by their coming of age in a contentious political climate marked by unprecedented levels of xenophobia and Islamophobia-driven rhetoric (Goldberg, 2016).

Despite the growth in the number of immigrant students in higher education, Kim and Diaz (2013) claim that the collegiate experiences of these students remain "under-

examined, inaccurately characterized, and often misunderstood" (p.1). In particular, there is scant research on Somali college students and their experiences. Somali college students are among the newest immigrant groups whose collegiate experiences have not yet been examined (Citizens League, 2009). This absence of knowledge and scarcity of literature on immigrant college students gives rise to presumed notions about immigrant college students that can negatively affect their educational equity and success (Gray et al., 1996). For these reasons, understanding the issues that immigrant students face is imperative for higher education educators, leaders, and policymakers, because such understanding has implications for pedagogical, administrative, and programmatic practices (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. xii).

The purpose of this study is to examine the identity development of Somali college students as a lens through which to understand their experiences. As Tores (2003) argues, studying identity development is "one of the most important theoretical tools that practitioners have to help them understand" the experiences of a multiculturalstudent body (p. 532). Other researchers have noted that the formation of identity shapes how college students adjust to campus environments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This qualitative project will use grounded theory as a framework to analyze and conceptualize how these students developed their identity. Grounded theory uses an inductive approach that enables data to give rise to theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 59). Due to the scarcity of literature about immigrant students in general, and Somali college students in particular, grounded theory is an appropriate method as it relies more on data generated through

interviews rather than an exhaustive review of existing literature (Charmaz, 2006; Citizens League, 2009; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Kim & Diaz, 2013, p.1).

As context for the study, Chapter 1 starts with a brief history of Somalis and the experience of Somalis in Minnesota. This is followed by the problem statement and research questions that will guide the study. Later, an explanation and justification of the conceptual and methodological frameworks that guide the collection and analysis of the data will be provided.

Somali Migration: A Brief History

Situated in the horn of Africa and with an estimated population of a just under 10 million, Somalia received its independence in 1960 when the British-ruled northern Somali and Italian-ruled southern Somali regions were merged to form the independent state of the Somali Republic. Like many other countries in post-colonial Africa, the nascent democracy in Somalia ended before it matured (Putman & Noor, 1993). Exploiting public bitterness toward the rigged elections of 1969, a military junta led by Major General Mohamed Siad Barre seized power in coup d'état on October 21, 1969, ending the democratic experiment and steering the country into the Eastern Bloc in the process. Barre's socialist style of governance soon ossified into a dictatorship. In 1991, an armed rebellion overthrew Barre and plunged the country into a cycle of civil war that continues to this day (Lewis, 1999).

As a result of this war, many Somalis fled the violence in their homeland and sought refuge in other countries (McGown, 1999). Today there is a diaspora of more than one million Somalis in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and the Middle East.

Another million refugees are scattered in East African and Middle Eastern countries. The largest Somali diaspora outside Africa exists in the United States (McGown, 1999).

During the 1980s, Somalis started coming to the United States in small numbers as refugees. But with the outbreak of the civil war in Somalia, the number of refugees started to expand greatly (Putman & Noor, 1993). Today, there are large concentrations of Somali communities in many large U.S. cities. The biggest of these is in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, followed by those in Columbus, Ohio, and Seattle, Washington. U.S. Census figures show that Minnesota is home to more than 50,000 people of Somali ancestry, while other regions such as the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, Ohio, Washington, and California have Somali populations of more than 20,000, 10,000, 9,000, and 7,000 respectively (U.S. Census, 2010).

Refugee Resettlement. Resettling is one of three approaches that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) uses to manage these populations. The other two alternatives are repatriation to the country of origin or integration with local communities within the first country of asylum. A small fraction of the total refugee population receives an opportunity for a third country. In fact, less than one percent of refugees are resettled in third countries—mostly the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand (Putman & Noor, 1993).

Refugees are admitted into the United States under the Refugee Act of 1980. The Act admitted refugees on a systematic basis for humanitarian reasons. The Refugee Act formally incorporated the U.S. law into the international definition of “refugee” contained in the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and

its 1967 Protocol (Kennedy, 2007). A refugee is defined as "a person outside of his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." (Kennedy, 2007, p. 154).

Nearly all the Somalis in Minnesota are refugees admitted into the United States under the Refugee Act of 1980 (Potocky-Tripodi, 2004). These refugees left their country following the outbreak of the Somali civil war that began in early 1991 (Yusuf, 2012). Although the terms "refugees" and "immigrants" are used interchangeably in public and academic discourses, the UNHCR notes that "the two terms have distinct and different meanings, and confusing them leads to problems for both populations" (Edwards, 2015, para. 2). The term refugee refers to individuals who underwent a forced migration, while immigrant refers to those who voluntarily move from their homeland to a foreign country in a search of better economic opportunities. The differences in the motivation and nature of migration between refugees and immigrants affects their ability to successfully adjust to their new country (Edwards, 2015). Despite these differences, educational researchers commonly refer to both foreign-born students and students with one or both parents who are foreign born as "immigrant students," regardless of reasons for their migration (Kim & Diaz, 2013). It is for this reason that I chose to use "immigrant" instead of "refugee" for the purpose of this dissertation in my references to Somali college students.

Somalis in Minnesota. Since the early 1990s, Minnesota has seen a steep rise in the number of immigrants moving to the state. Whereas the national rate of growth of foreign-born immigrants stood at 57%, Minnesota's immigrant population grew by more

than 130% (Minneapolis Foundation, 2010). In 1990, Minnesota immigrants made up 2.6% of the total population. By 2000, the percentage of immigrants doubled to 5.3% (United States Census Bureau as cited in American Immigration Council, 2013). A decade later, 7.8% of the state's population were foreign-born immigrants (Minnesota Compass, 2013).

Somalis are among the fastest growing segments of Minnesota's immigrant populations. According to the US Census, over 50,000 Somalis live in Minnesota (American Immigration Council, 2013). The increase is even greater among school-age children. The number of students from homes where Somali is the native language grew from 1,897 in 1998-99 to 10,637 in 2008-09. This increase represented a 461% growth rate in a span of a decade (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2013).

Most of the Somalis in Minnesota live in Minneapolis and St. Paul (Boyle & Songora, 2004). The first group of Somalis came to Minnesota in 1994. Many of them were sponsored by Lutheran Social Services, a local nonprofit organization that previously participated in the resettlement of refugees from Indochina in the 1970s. Attracted by the availability of labor jobs that required little or no linguistic skills or education, other Somalis emigrated from other states, setting off a chain migration that continues today (Minneapolis Foundation, 2004).

Most Somalis came to Minnesota as secondary immigrants, meaning that they lived in other parts of the United States previously. In a study of immigrants in the state, close to a half of the Somalis cited the presence of family or an extended family member as the primary reason for moving to Minnesota (Mattessich, 2000). The strong desire to

be close to extended family members indicates the importance of kinship in the Somali community. As Lewis argues in his book, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society*, clan kinship is the basic societal unit among Somalis (1994). Clan solidarity is an expression of family unity, as a clan is in a sense an extended family. Through interaction and socialization with this extended family, Somali children learn about gender roles and proper behavior within the context of clan membership (Putman & Noor, 1999). This familial and communal socialization impacts the identity development of young immigrants (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013).

Somalis are a more recent immigrant group, so research on their identity formation and patterns of cultural adaptation remains nascent (Kateijns & Arman, 2004). A comprehensive study documented wide-ranging primary data on Somalis in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, including approximately 1000 randomly selected immigrant subjects from neighborhoods with a large concentration of Somali immigrants and refugees (Mattessich, 2000). More than 74% of interviewed Somalis identified with their native culture, and more than half expressed hope that future generations of Somali Americans will integrate their cultural heritage into their adopted American identity. Half of the respondents indicated a preference that their children be bilingual speakers of English and Somali (Mattessich, 2000).

A study that used six focus groups totaling 23 high school students investigated how the identity of Somali youth in Minnesota is racialized and gendered (Bigelow, 2008). These young people shared their experiences of coming to terms with racial categories imposed by the educational and governmental institutions with which they

interfaced daily (Bigelow, 2008). The study noted how participants came to the United States with ethnic and religious identity, but over time assume an identity that "racialized" and "minoritized" them. Despite the societal imposition of racialized identity upon them, Somali students put forth intentional efforts to retain their "Somaliness."

The racialized identities of Somali students are mediated by their gender and religious faith (Bigelow, 2008). Again, Somalis are a predominantly Muslim society (Putman & Noor, 1999). Islamic faith involves a dress code, but these visible symbols of faith only affect the female practicioners. As most of Minnesota's Muslim population comprises Somali immigrants, female Muslims wearing hijab, the Islamic female dress, are enabled to assert their Somali identity. Conversely, because boys do not dress religiously, they lack the opportunity to assert their "Somaliness" and actively construct their identity in the process (Bigelow, 2008).

While Bigelow (2008) viewed Somali females' Islamic identity symbolized by hijab as an empowering experience that allows them to show their Somali identity and ethnic pride, Abdi (2014) critiqued this arrangement as a perpetuation of patriarchy and relegation of women's status to a subservient position in relation to men. Her 13-month ethnographic study in which she interviewed more than 100 Somalis in Minnesota reveals that increased religious consciousness triggered by immigration-related stressors gave rise to gender roles that reinforced patriarchal tendencies in Somali culture. As a result, Somali women's ability to participate actively in the construction of their identities in the context of their immigration is greatly weakened (Abdi, 2014).

Many researchers have noted the increased religiosity of Somali immigrants in the West. McCown (1999) explained the new spiritual awareness as a response to the violent experiences that many Somali immigrants endured as a result of their country's ongoing civil war. The relevance of religion was also contributed to by immigrants' need for a comprehensive guideline to help them manage their new environment.

Since 9/11, religious identity has taken on new importance among American Muslims. The rise of "identity Islam," in which Muslims assert their religious identity, is attributed to the influence of family and the discriminatory experiences emanating from increased Islamophobia in media and politics (Peek, 2005). The experience of discrimination has had the effect of rising religious consciousness among American Muslims (Peek, 2005). This increased religiosity among Muslims in America is more pronounced among the younger generation for whom the feelings of societal alienation and everyday racism caused them to embrace their religious heritage. In turn, the resulting spiritual consciousness made religion the most salient dimension of their identity (Peek, 2005).

While the reviewed studies on Somali immigrants do not focus on identity development, they provide crucial insights into this population's experiences. Collectively, these studies depict the complex and dynamic factors that affect the identity formation of Somali college students. They show the factors that impact the acculturation processes of Somali immigrants (Mattessich, 2000), the racialized identities that mainstream society and institutions impose on immigrants (Bigelow, 2008), and that

discrimination and alienation can create religiously salient identities (McCown, 1999; Peek, 2005).

As is the case with other recent immigrant groups, the lack of research on Somali college students leaves a knowledge void often filled by misguided assumptions that prove deleterious to the wellbeing of these students (Kim & Diaz, 2013). Future research needs to fill the identified gap on the knowledge of Somali students, their college experiences, and how it impacts the development of their identity during their undergraduate years. Developing a meaningful understanding of student experiences is critical to the creation of educational environments that maximize students' ability to succeed in higher education (Stewart, 2008).

Problem Statement

The use of student identity development as a lens to examine how college experience impacts students has been a "hallmark of higher education and student affairs research and practice," observe Jones and Abes (2013, p. 1). Despite the voluminous research on the topic, there is very little literature on the experience of immigrant students and the formation of their identity (Kim & Diaz, 2013). The absence of research on the experiences of immigrant college students presents opportunities for researchers to explore the identity development of immigrant college students and its impact on these students' academic achievement and personal wellbeing.

Answering questions relating to the experiences of immigrant students is important to the field of higher education because identity development theories explain the factors that impact student development, how the campus atmosphere impacts these

factors, and how student affairs professionals respond to these factors in order to facilitate student growth and success (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). As Stewart (2008) notes, creating a college environment that promotes student wellbeing first requires an understanding of how college affects the development of diverse student identities.

Research that examines the identity development of Somali college students will help educational institutions and individual educators adapt to the changing demographic makeup of the United States' college students. This research will also provide insights into the experiences of these students and their impact on academic success and personal wellbeing. Finally, this study has the potential to narrow the critical gap in the literature on immigrant students.

Research Questions

To examine the experiences of Somali college students, this qualitative study will conceptualize how undergraduate Somali students construct their ethnic and racial identity in the context of college. The study will seek to answer the following research questions:

- How do Somali students perceive their racial and ethnic identities?
- How do Somali students identify the experiences and factors that influence the formation and development of their identities?
- How do Somali students attach meaning to their collegiate experiences?

Researchers, educators and practitioners have long been interested in college students' identity development. Identity development theories are an outgrowth of the psychosocial theories of Erik Erikson (1959; 1963; 1968). Erikson proposed a model of

human development consisting of a series of "crises" that occur throughout one's lifespan (1968, p. 188-190). On the assumption that college students have universal experiences irrespective of their backgrounds, this interest focused on white students (Pascarella & Tarenzini, 2005). However, during the last two decades, there has been greater awareness of how race, ethnicity, gender, immigration, sexual orientation and the intersections of these dimensions impact the identity development of college students (Abes et al., 2007; Chang & Kwan, 2009; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Pascarella & Tarenzin, 2005, p.25; Phinney, 1990, 1992; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012, p. 15).

Although there have been numerous studies on how college students develop ethnic and racial identity (Evans, Forney& Guido-DiBrito, 2010; McEwen, 2003), the identity formation of immigrant college students remains understudied (Kim & Diaz, 2013). Framed by Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory, this study investigates how Somali college students develop a sense of identity. Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model places individual development within the nexus of social, environmental, historical and institutional structures, and conceptualizes this study (Bronfenbrenner & Morsi, 1993).

Purpose and the significance of the study

Somali college students are among one of the least studied populations (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). While their enrollment rates continue to increase, very little is known about their experiences and how college affects them (Leittner, 2008; SLEDS, 2015). The purpose of this study is to investigate how Somali college students develop their ethnic and racial identities as a lens through which to examine to their collegiate experiences,

and how these identities are shaped by the familial, communal, and institutional contexts in which their lives are embedded.

Research on student identity development addresses important aspects of student experiences and the developmental outcomes that colleges and universities promote for undergraduates (Evans et al., 1998). As such, this study is significant as it will help scholars and practitioners of higher education understand a growing but understudied population.

Examining the diverse identities that students bring to the campus and the classroom is necessary to creating more welcoming and inclusive conditions. A 2003 report series by the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) focuses on diverse student identity developments and their implications. For teaching and administration in higher education, ASHE contends that in order to "truly assess and identify what campus culture is and how it can influence diverse students," higher education scholars and practitioners need to understand the processes that affect student identity development (Torres et al., 2003, p. 532).

In addition to helping create an inviting campus climate, understanding the identity development of understudied groups can be helpful in redesigning course materials and making the classroom more inclusive. The efforts to diversify curriculum, argues Tatum (1996), has the potential to provoke divergent feelings and reactions in the classroom. Handling reactions that could include "complete detachment from the class stemming from anger and resentment to excitement and eagerness," requires a grasp of students' ethnic and racial identity formation in college as it is critical to competently

"guide students through their own awareness of privilege, oppression and racial consciousness" (Torres et al., 2003, p. 87).

Multiple studies have noted the connection between the development of students' sense of identity and belonging on one hand, and sense of belonging and academic success on the other (Cohen & Garcia, 2010; Cooper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). As Cohen and Garcia (2010) argue, "social identities can affect the motivation to achieve through their interaction with a sense of belonging," (p. 365) whereas Cooper (2009) calls for "purposeful cultivation of collective identity among a diverse student body," (p. 1) as a means to promote student belonging. Similarly, Strayhorn (2012) contends that in order to "understand students' belonging experiences, one must pay attention to issues of identity" (p. 22).

Understanding how immigrant students develop a sense of identity is necessary for higher education institutions' efforts to create an environment of inclusion and awareness. When students feel that their identities are threatened, their sense of belonging is undermined (Cohen & Garcia, 2010). The obviation of students' ability to identify with their academic environment undermines their ability to succeed (Cooper, 2009). This relationship among the integrity of students' identity, their perception of belonging to their campus environments and the subsequent impact of a damaged sense of belonging makes the identity development of an increasing number of immigrant students an important area of study for higher education researchers and practitioners. The critical nature of this study is particularly heightened by currently hostile campus environments fueled by the increasingly normalized xenophobic and Islamophobia-based political

rhetoric that further marginalizes an already vulnerable student demographic (Golberg, 2016).

Chapter 1 addresses the research questions, the purpose, and the significance of the dissertation project. The chapter also provides historical and demographic context of Somali college students in Minnesota. Chapter 2 focusses on analytical review of literature and lays out the conceptual framework that guides the dissertation while Chapter 3 addresses the methodological framework with which data is analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings whereas Chapter 5 interprets the findings in relation to the existing literature and discusses implication for research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The structure of the literature review reflects the historical evolution of the theorization of identity development theories. As previously discussed, research on student identity development starts with the foundational theories of the psychologist Erik Erikson which presupposed the existence of a universal "epigenetic" human development view in which successive maturational "crises" set the stage for the next developmental milestones (Jones & Abe, 2014). Erikson's foundational theories were followed by models that recognized the saliency of socially constructed identities of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation to the identity development of historically underrepresented and underserved populations (Pascarella & Tarenzini, 2005).

It is against this historical progression that the first body of literature includes scholars whose work is informed by psychosocial theories of Erik Erikson (1959, 1963, 1968). Research in the second body of literature is guided by socially constructed dimensions of identities such as race and ethnicity, as well as models that recognize the multiple and overlapping dimensions of identity development. The third body of literature draws from social-ecological theory that places individual identity formation in multiple proximal contexts such family and community, and distal contexts such as local, national, and global (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The consideration of these contexts is imperative because student identities develop as the result of the ongoing interplay of contextual factors with the person (Erikson, 1968). After providing a description of Bronfenbrenner's model of social-ecological development, a conceptual framework based thereupon is presented. This model will frame this dissertation on the identity

development of Somali college students, and serve as the conceptual framework that will guide the collection and analysis of the qualitative data.

Psychosocial Theories

The first body of literature covers the work of foundational researchers, educators, and practitioners whose work examined how college students develop a sense of identity and personhood. The work of these researchers focused on psychosocial theories that explain how student identity is shaped by college experiences (McEwan, 2003). Psychosocial identity development theories are an outgrowth of Erik Erikson's research on human development (1959, 1963, 1968). Erikson proposed a model of human development consisting of a series of "crises" that occur in one's lifespan. Marcia (1966) refined Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, and noted that identity development for college students involves two tasks of *exploration* of different options and *commitment* to career and worldview.

Marcia (1966, 1980) operationalized Eriksonian psychosocial theories defined by catalytic crises preceding a particular stage of development. In this model, college students are presumed to move from a) a state of identity diffused/reflected by the absence of vocational or philosophical interests to b) foreclosed identity characterized by uncritical absorption of views received from authority figures to c) identity achieved in which student develops and commits to a set of individual, philosophical and vocational propositions.

Other psychosocial theories on student development include Chickering's seven vectors of development (1969) which depicts student identity development in terms of

tasks moving along vectors while students develop intellectual competence, emotional regulation, social interdependence, interpersonal skills, individual identity, life purpose, and integrity. These seven vectors were later revised to indicate that the processes of the seven vectors are not sequential, and that there was no uniformity in how different individuals accomplish the attainment of these vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The problem with the psychosocial theories is that they assumed universality of college student development, and therefore did not take dimensions of identity such as race and ethnicity and how they affect the formation of identity into account (Pascarella & Tarenzini, 2005). Although this foundational research is informative of important aspects of human development, it misses the unique experiences of Somali students and other underrepresented groups.

Another critical shortcoming of psychosocial theories is that they are founded on the assumption that the individual, rather than the society, is the primary source of identity. These theories are derived from psychological research that considers individual traits and characteristics as the basis of identity. Although Erikson discussed the importance of historical contexts in examining human development, his theories are rooted in classical psychological assumptions that paid little attention to contexts and assumed universality of its application (Erikson, 1968). This point reduces the relevance of his work and that of other psychosocial theorists to immigrant groups like Somalis whose identity dimensions were formed in contexts of immigration and dislocation.

Socially Constructed Identity Theories

The second body of literature is categorized under the rubric of social identity theories, which examine the role of identity dimensions like race and ethnicity in the formation of student identity. Social identity theory postulates that membership in a racial and ethnic group is critical to identity development for underrepresented students for whom interaction with dominant groups reinforces their perceptions of themselves as minorities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Other researchers defined social identities as "a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 23).

Most early research on student identity development assumed that college students had more or less universal experiences during college years, irrespective of their backgrounds, and therefore discounted the particularities of race and ethnicity (Pascarella &Tarenzini, 2005). However, during the last two decades, there has been greater importance placed upon the consideration of different identity dimensions and their intersections, as these dimensions impact the identity development of college students (Pascarella & Tarenzin, 2005).

Racial identity development model. This set of literature reflects the shift in identity development research from general to specific. From this perspective emerged literature examining how race affects the identity development of college students (Cross, 1971, 1991; Helms, 1990). Racial identity is described as the ways in which people define who they are on the basis of a racial group in a particular context (Pizarro & Vera,

2001). Because race is the most "salient organizing social category" in the United States, it continues to be a "critical element of individual and group identities" (Renn, 2012, p. 15). For immigrant students like Somalis, observes Bigelow (2008), immigration to the United States entails a process of racialization as they move into a society where racial categorization constitutes the fundamental organizing principle. The intensified racialization experience makes them conscious of the racial background of their identity, making race a key aspect of their identity and a significant lens through which to interpret their college experiences (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

These models focus on how the impact of and response to racism shape and influence identity development of racial minority students. Cross (1971) constructed a model he called Nigrescene that depicts the stages students go through in the process of transitioning from lack of awareness with respect to their identity as blacks, to experiencing racial consciousness and embracing their race as blacks. This model reflects the evolution of the Civil Rights Movement, wherein the initial stages were characterized by the liberation movement which led to legislative victories and culminated in the empowerment of black people to choose how they identify themselves. Cross's model was revised (1991) to reflect the realities of black college students beyond the years of the Civil Rights Movement. The revised model consisted of three concepts and four stages.

The three concepts that affect how students move from one stage to the next are personal identity such as individual traits, reference group orientation with which the individual is associated, and the primary racial identity that is salient. The four sequential

stages are: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization-commitment. In the pre-encounter stage, the person displays hostile attitudes towards other blacks and aims to eliminate all signifiers of black culture. During the pre-encounter stage, there is a strong desire for acceptance into the mainstream culture.

The encounter stage is characterized by introspection triggered by positive and negative racial experiences (Cross, 1991). As a result, the individual starts to embrace aspects of her or his black identity and expresses acceptance regarding how this identity impacts the person's day-to-day experiences. The immersion-emersion stage unfolds in two parts. The first part goes beyond acceptance of cultural ideals and moves to the idealization of cultural artifacts such as food, clothing, and traditions. The immersion aspect is reflected by the intentional search for support from peers who hold similar views and attitudes.

The fourth stage is internalization in which the individual feels empowered to resolve internal contradictions. This stage allows the individual to shift the focus of her or his energy from hostility towards a dominant race to building coalitions with other underrepresented races. The second component of this stage that Cross (1991) identifies is commitment. In the internalization-commitment stage, the individual builds a stable identity rooted in a supportive community of likeminded individuals.

Helms (1990) conceptualized the process by which racial identity development unfolds for college students in three types. First of these types is an individual identity represented by the attitudes the person holds about self. The second type is a reference group orientation characterized by the values one associates with a particular group. The

third type is represented by ascribed identity, which reflects a deeper level of commitment to a racial group.

Whereas Cross's (1971, 1991) model of five stages expounds upon the trajectory of black college student identity development, Helms (1990) aims to advance a model that can describe how the identity of college students from different racial minority groups develops. These groups include African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. This model depicts a continuum of development that places students on six successive statuses. These statuses are a) conformity, in which the primary source of students' identity is the attitudes whites hold about minority groups, including freely accepting these stereotypical attitudes in order to further their assimilation efforts, b) dissonance, characterized by the realization that full assimilation is not attainable due to unacceptance on the part of whites, c) immersion, a process in which students consciously relearn about their identity, d) emersion, in which students express solidarity with their racial groups, e) internalization, marked by a commitment to the welfare of their racial groups, and f) integrated awareness, in which students display pride in their own racial identity.

Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley and Chavous (1998) put forward a model that rejected the sequenced, linear stage theories of Cross (1971, 1991) and Helms (1990). Rather than assuming that individuals go through successive developmental stages in the process of forming racial identity, Sellers et al. (1998) proposed the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) in which the person determines the value they attach to being a member of a particular racial group. This model specifies "four dimensions of

racial identity that address both the significance and the qualitative meaning of race in the self-concepts" (p. 24). Two of these dimensions are *salience* and *centrality,* which refer to the value individuals assign to race when defining their identity. The other two dimensions are *regard* and *ideology*, which refer to the conceptions individuals assign to the meaning of Black identity.

Despite significant scholarship on racial identity over the past four decades, researchers have not agreed on its operational definition (Helms, 1995; Sellers et al., 1998). Research on racial identity theory overlooks diversity within racial categories. Racial categories describe broad social classifications to which students belong or identify as members of a racial group (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Somalis, as Africans, are classified under the category of black, which is defined as persons originating from the continent of Africa (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). The problem with this categorization, according to Bigelow (2010, p. 109), is that it blurs the distinctions between different groups who trace their ancestry to Africa, therefore failing to factor in the unique experiences and contexts that influence the formation of identity. In essence, it genericizes the experiences of different black groups whose historical circumstances and migration stories are neither monolithic nor homogenous. This is because race is only one aspect of Somali identity. As immigrants, Somalis come to the United States with a developed sense of ethnic and religious identity in addition to their racial identity as blacks. Additionally, the hostile sociopolitical atmosphere generated by their Muslim faith and their immigrant status can impact the salience and relevance of other dimensions of their identity (Bigelow, 2010).

Ethnic identity development model. Other researchers focus on other components of social identity theory, such as ethnicity and its implications for identity development among college students. Most of this research views ethnic identity development as the process of finding resolution to the inevitable conflict between how society wants to see and how individuals want to be seen as members of a particular ethnic group (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Phinney, 1990). Ethnicity influences identity development of young adults because it entails the internalization of a particular worldview and a corollary way of life rooted in the traditional practices of the ethnicity of the individual (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

Ethnic identity development theories explain the ways in which cultural, religious, geographical, and linguistic traits common to a particular ethnicity develop a shared sense of ethnic identity (Torres, 1996). Phinney (1992) outlined the varying impact of ethnicity on identity formation of young adults. He proposed how ethnicity becomes a salient feature and shapes the psychosocial stage of identity development as formulated by Erikson (1968.) Phinney argued that the transformative impact of ethnic dimensions of the identity of college students can be divided into three states: a) diffusion-foreclosure, in which students uncritically subscribe to the societal stereotypes towards minority communities, b) the moratorium state in which students attain ethnic identity consciousness and c) the identity achievement stage, in which students work out internal contradictions resulting from the reality of living in two different cultures simultaneously.

Ethnic identity development models explain how common cultural, religious, geographical, and linguistic traits develop a shared sense of ethnic identity (Torres,

2003), and are therefore helpful in gaining insights into a group like Somalis who embody these attributes. However, the terms used to define ethnic and racial identity overlap, creating a confusion of what can be attributed to race and ethnicity in studying identity. Phinney (1996) went as far as to suggest that racial identity is only a facet of ethnic identity, and therefore should not be considered as a valid construct to interrogate identity. Additionally, like racial development models, ethnic identity theories overlook the contextual and cultural differences that mold the identities of different ethnic groups. Studying the identity formation of specific cultural groups with unique historical experiences such as Somali college students in Minnesota could provide fresh insights into how the identity of culturally distinctive minority youths develop (Schachter, 2004).

Intersectionality. Although there has been substantial research on multiple identities of college students (Abes & Jones, 2004; Jones & McEwen, 2000), there has been a dearth on intersections of social identities and the confluence of structures of privilege and oppression in shaping the identities of young adults. As Torres et al. note, though theories like the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) pay attention to the impact of contexts, the "larger structures of power and oppression that interact with individual identities in both particular and systemic" are not sufficiently considered (2009, p. 587). The focus on multiple structures of power and privilege is reflected in the scholarship that adapts an intersectional analytical lens.

Intersectionality is valuable in understanding how various identities of students affect and amplify each other. Informed by feminist critique of structural discrimination imbedded in cultural and societal institutions, intersectionality provides an analytic lens

which is useful in examining how students' ethnicity and immigrant background are shaped by the dominant categories of race and class in the context of higher education (Crenshaw, 1991; Shields, 2008). Intersectionality adapts critical analysis in order to explain the formation of identity. It focuses on the multiple ways in which identity dimensions interact with each other and create oppressive conditions and uplifting experiences (Acker, 2006). Designed to address the understudied experiences of marginalized groups, intersectionality is defined as "an innovative and emerging field of study that provides a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, physical ability, age, sexuality, and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of inequality" (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 1).

The use of an analytical lens grounded in feminist critique of structural discriminations in studying identity development of Somali college students is vital for this dissertation project. As previously noted, Somali culture is rooted in patriarchal traditions with strong emphasis on gender roles that reflect Islamic teachings (Kapteijns, 1999). In the context of Somali culture gender relations, interactions play out through gendered power dynamics that shape Somali women's identity (Kapteijns 1993).

The intersectionality lens is crucial in understanding the complex and layered identities in which Somali students' lives are embedded, and how these contextual complexities impact the development of their identities. In particular, intersectionality is indispensable in understanding how Somali females negotiate their identities in the face of the patriarchal structures of tradition and in the context of their status as ethnic, racial, and religious minorities. This creates an atmosphere in which Somali females find

themselves marginalized by both the patriarchy in their culture and the racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia of the wider society. The resulting conflicting identities present a challenge of having to negotiate what it means to be a Somali female college student within the confines of her family and community's patriarchal structures while asserting her identity as a black, Muslim immigrant. Since the participants in this dissertation study live at the intersections of multiple identities, the intersectional lens is indispensable in exploring how these identities impact each other.

Transnational identity development

There exists a critical gap in the scholarship on how college experiences impact student identity development regarding the role of immigration history (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). Immigration history is seldom incorporated into the social-ecological models, as these models tend to focus on how racial and ethnic dimensions shape identity development (Pope, 2000).

When researchers consider immigration history as a factor in identity development, the focus often is on acculturation and assimilation processes. Both acculturation and assimilation presuppose that immigrations entail a break with the home countries' identities and relationships, and therefore view immigrant experiences solely within the social, cultural, political and economic milieu of the receiving countries (Leitner, 2004). As such, the concepts of integration and assimilation are insufficient in accounting for the multiple identities that present-day immigrants espouse. This point is where the relevance of the concept becomes useful in explaining how contemporary immigrants maintain identifications with their native countries. Transnationalism

explains how immigrants “sustain familial, economic, cultural and political ties and identities that span borders” (Leitner, 2004, p. 44).

A closely related concept to transnationalism is that of diasporic identity. The term diaspora refers to the displacement from one’s country and the continued physical or symbolic attachment to the original homeland (Clifford, 2005; Safran, 1991). Kasbarian argues, “the homeland, from which the diaspora is considered to be tragically exiled” (2015, p. 359). The notion of such a homeland is imbued with a “mixture of sites and cultures, located in history, memory and the present” (Kasparian, 2015, p. 359).). The memories of the homeland are vital for “they illuminate and transform the present” (Hooks, 1991, p. 147). The present trajectories of identity formations of immigrant college students like Somalis in Minnesota need to be grounded in their lived-in diasporic experiences. Bigelow argues that diaspora is a “powerful and useful construct” in studying Somali immigrants “because of the fact that being ‘Somali’ still matters to many who left Somalia; and that the notion of ‘Somaliness’ still has great power in the ethos of Somali communities and identities around the globe” (2010, p. 3). The “distal” aspects of the social-ecological model might be the most insightful in understanding how Somali college students work out questions relating to the formation of their identities.

Model of multiple dimensions of identity

The model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) depicts development that transcends the deterministic and sequential stages of psychosocial development. It focuses on the interactions between different dimensions of identity and the choices

individuals make about these dimensions as they engage in the process of constructing their identity (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Jones and McEwen (2000) propose a concept of identity with an inner "core" influenced by outer layers consisting of race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. These layers of identities interact and influence each other and therefore must be understood in their totality as opposed to examining them in isolation from each other. The salience of each dimension of individual identity is predicated upon the particular context in which an individual is operating at any given time. These contexts include but are not limited to: family of origin, cultural upbringing, and career and life journeys (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The multiple model of identity was later revised to include the process through which individuals attach meaning to their experiences as an important factor in the construction of identities both at individual and societal levels. This revision was done out of the realization that individuals are active participants in the process of the development of their identities and not mere spectators (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

As with the social-ecological model, the multiple identity model accounts for interactions between contextual, systemic, and institutional factors to examine human development, making it a very useful framework with which to study Somali students whose recent immigration and adjustment experiences influence the formation of their identity. Unlike Erikson, however, whose theory of human development uses few concepts to explain a wide range of identity development phenomena, the social-ecological and multiple identity models include too many concepts, making them too descriptive. The various concepts included in these models are given equal explanatory

weight. Race, class, family, and gender are assumed to have similar impacts on the development of identity. This might not be the case for all cultural groups. For example, family dynamics in the context of Somali culture may not necessarily be generalizable to Hmong culture.

Social-ecological model

While both psychosocial and social identity theories are critical to understanding the formation of identity of college students, consideration must be given to how identity development is affected by immediate and distal social and historical contexts. The third body of literature reviewed focuses on social and cultural contexts which draw from the social-ecological theory developed by Bronfenbrehher (1989). This theory is particularly useful in understanding the multiple encounters, networks, and institutions that characterize the diverse contexts of immigrant students. These social contexts can be divided into "proximal" such as family, friends, and community contexts, and "distal" such as local, national, and global contexts (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The model provides a theoretical framework for analysis of how individuals interface with the environments in which they live in a particular social and historical context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

In the next section, a detailed explanation of MMDI, the social-ecological model, and the justification of their use as an integrated framework to conceptualize the identity development of Somali college students will be provided.

Conceptual Framework of Identity Development

Identity development is defined as a "process of increasing differentiation in the sense of self and the integration of that growing complexity into a coherent whole" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; p. 23). For decades, researchers have associated the development of identity among college students with the attainment of "maximum effectiveness," (American Council on Education, 1937/1994, p. 69), academic success (Sanford, 1962) and intercultural competency (King & Magdola, 2005).

Identity development processes have been viewed as crucial to the examination and understanding of student experiences in order to facilitate their growth as scholars and citizens (Phinney, 1993). This is particularly critical to college students who, as young adults, are actively engaged in the process of constructing their identity and finding their place in society (Erikson, 1968). In addition to forming a sense of selfhood as young adults, college students are thrust into a collegiate environment that involves becoming conscious of who they are, demanding self-examination, and exposing them to different viewpoints and lifestyles (Azmitia et al., 2008).

The formation of identity takes on heightened importance for college students from ethnic and racial minorities who, in addition to going through the maturational stage of establishing their sense of personhood and embarking on a structured journey for self-exploration (Azmitia et al., 2008), are confronted with inescapable and omnipresent experiences of prejudice and racism (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Given these defining experiences with which ethnic and racial minority students have to come to terms, it is imperative to examine how their identity develops so that educators are better

informed about the experience of these students, and are subsequently able to provide environments conducive to effective and inclusive learning.

While there are many reasons to adapt the psychosocial, socially constructed theories of race and ethnicity, I chose the integrated framework of model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) and the social-ecological model because of the particular attention paid to the multiple identities that Somali college students embody and the various contexts within which their lives are embedded. As immigrants, blacks, and Muslims, Somali students inhabit unique spaces (Bigelow, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model allows understanding of their identity development within these multiple contexts, encounters, and relationships.

Two models are integrated in order to inform the conceptual framework of identity development of Somali college students: Model of Multiple Dimensions Multidimensional Identity (MMDI) and the socio-ecological model. The two models provide a framework for understanding the intersections of ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural dimensions and the influence of sociopolitical contextual factors on the relative salience of these dimensions. The holistic approach to studying identity is adapted in order to tackle the challenge of disentangling what aspect of identity can be labeled as racial and what is considered ethnic. The integration of different categories that make up Somali students' identity and the different contexts in which their lives are embedded into a single conceptual framework is intended to overcome the problematic task of compartmentalizing different aspects of identity into discrete categories. More importantly, it allows for a holistic examination of identity that reflects how multiplicity

and complexity of identity "confers a unique experience, above and beyond" the sum total of different dimensions of identity (Bowleg, 2008, p. 319).

The model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) presented here (see Figure 1) illustrates identity as a "core" self with multiple dimensions influenced by categories of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, and class. The multiple identity model depicts identity development that transcends the deterministic and sequential stages of psychosocial development. It focuses on the interactions between different dimensions of identity and the choices individuals make about these dimensions as they engage in the process of constructing their identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Jones and McEwen (2000) propose a concept of identity with an inner "core" influenced by outer layers consisting of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. These layers of identities interact and influence each other, and therefore must be understood in their totality as opposed to examining them in isolation from each other. The salience of each dimension of individual identity is predicated upon the particular context in which an individual is operating at any given time. These contexts include but are not limited to family of origin, cultural upbringing, as well as career and life journeys (Jones and McEwen, 2000). The multiple model of identity was later revised in order to include the process through which individuals attach meaning to their experiences as an important factor in the construction of identities at both individual and societal levels. This revision was done out of the realization that individuals are active

participants in the process of the development of their identities and not mere spectators (Jones and McEwen, 2000).

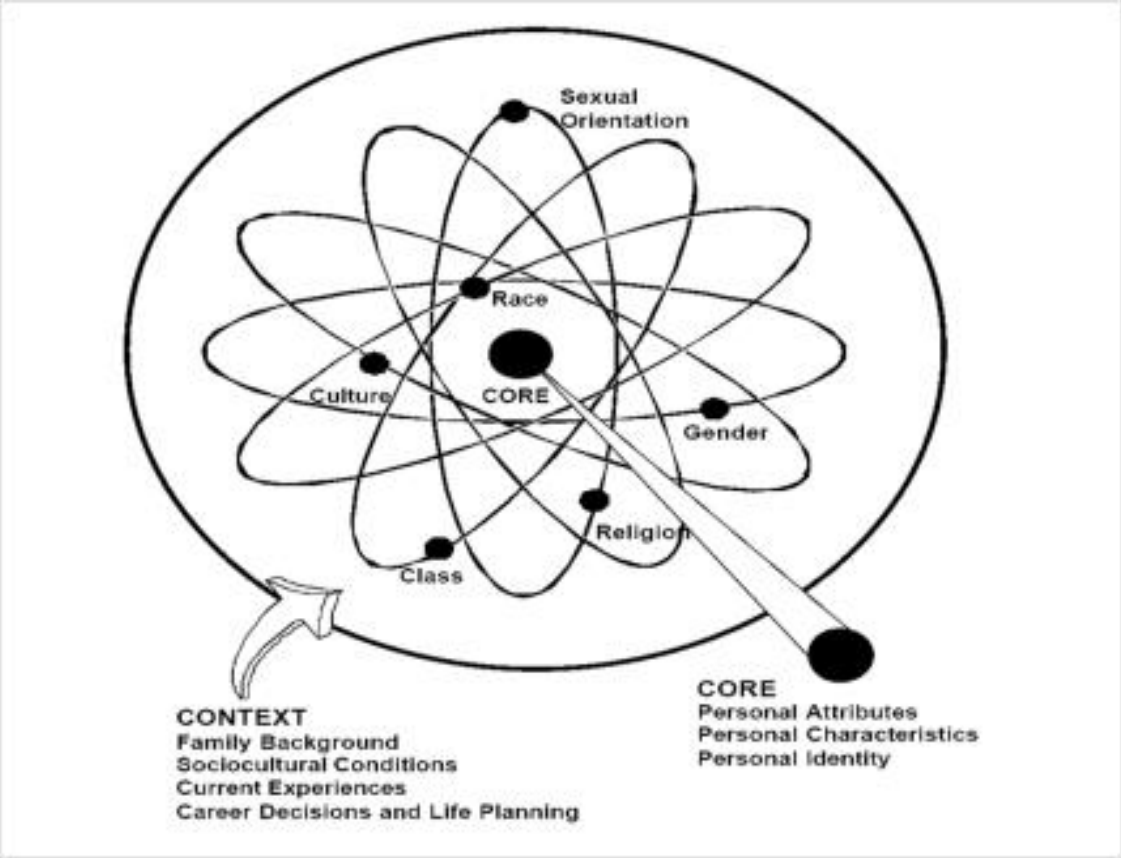

Figure 1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwan, 2000)

I chose MMDI because it encompasses the three major strands of research on student identity development. It includes elements from the foundational identities of Erik Erikson (Jones & Abes, 2014). As previously discussed, Erikson's theory of human development proposes a staged developmental model consisting of five stages that expound human development throughout one's lifespan. The stage that is relevant to college students depicts the college years as a time of "exploration" of ideas and

"commitment" to a particular worldview. These two concepts of exploration and commitment shape college students' sense of self and identity. The second major construct incorporated into MMDI is the social identities of ethnicity and race and their impact on student identity formation. Ethnicity influences the identity development of young adults because it involves in the internalization of a particular worldview and a corollary way of life rooted in the traditional practices of the ethnic background of the individual. Racial identity development refers to the staged process that young adults go through as they gain awareness and saliency of their identity. The third theoretical work reflected in MMDI is socio-cultural theories that explain how individual development is influenced by the participation in cultural activities and social interactions (Jones & Abes, 2014).

In addition to accounting for the multiple dimensions of Somali college student identity such as race, ethnicity, and culture, this dissertation considers the contextual forces that influence these constructs of identity. While MMDI is useful in illustrating the interplay of various identity categories, Broffenbrenner's social-ecological model accounts for the multiple contexts across time and space in which students' lives are rooted, making it critical in understanding how young adults form a sense of identity. As Torres et al. argue, "multiple identities must be connected to the larger social structures in which they are embedded" (2009, p. 587).

While there are many reasons to adapt the psychosocial, socially constructed theories of race and ethnicity, as well as the multidimensional models as a framework for studying the identity development of Somali students and their collegiate experiences, I

chose the social-ecological framework because of the particular attention it pays to the multiple contexts within which the lives of Somali students are embedded. As immigrants, blacks, and Muslims, Somali students inhabit unique spaces (Bigelow, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model allows understanding of their identity development within these multiple contexts, encounters, and relationships.

The social-ecological theory is particularly useful in framing the identity development of Somali college students as it incorporates the multiple encounters, networks, and institutions that shape the experience of young adults as well as the diverse contexts that shape how the development of their identity unfolds. These social contexts can be divided into "proximal" such as family, friends, and community contexts, and "distal" such as local, national, and global contexts (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The social-ecological theory provides a theoretical framework to conceptualize and analyze how individuals interface with their environments given social contexts and historical periods (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Several studies have noted the significance of identity formation in an ecological context and social milieu (Gergen, 1991; McEwen, 2003). Others contend that "individuals' interactions with their environment affect their perceived identities and impact their sense of self and relations with others" (Kim & Diaz, 2013, p. 103). Bronfenbrenner's model of social-ecological theory that places individual development within the nexus of social, environmental, historical, and institutional structures form the basis of the interview questions. This theory outlines how the interactions between the individual and context influence development of identity (1989).

Social-ecological theory depicts human development as a product of dynamic interactions between the individual and her or his environment, and that this interactive process “must take place in the immediate, face-to-face setting in which the person exists” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 10).

The theory, represented in Figure 2, emphasizes the contextual particulars in which the person’s interaction with the environment takes place. According to Bronfenbrenner, contexts, as shown in Figure 1, consist of five, nested systems wherein each system is represented by a circle. The five contexts are a) the individual, which represents the person’s attitudes and behaviors, b) microsystems such as family, teachers, employers, and communities, c) mesosystems, represented by communal and organizational relationships, d) exosystems, including policies that guide governmental and organizational entities, and e) macrosystems, such as developments in history, societal trends, and political attitudes towards immigrants.

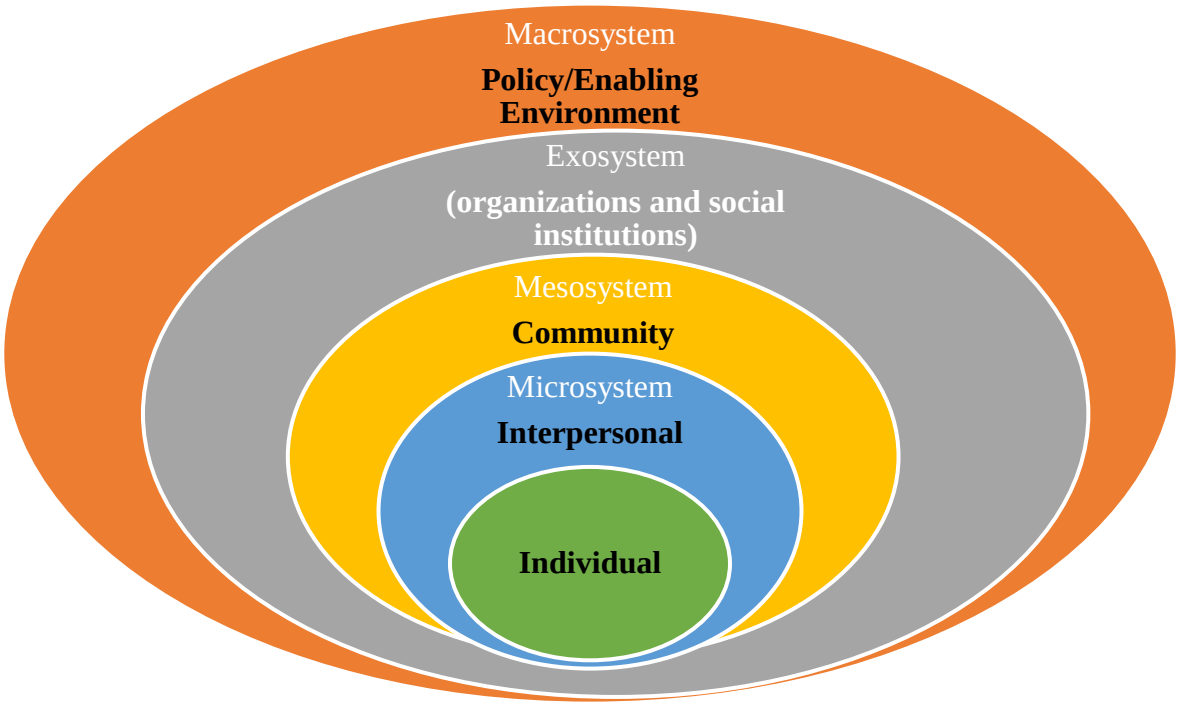

Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological theory (UNICEF, 2014)

Ethnic and racial identity development takes place in multiple social, historical, and environmental contexts and "must, therefore, be understood within the context of the many experiences, relationships, and institutions that individuals encounter across the life span" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). These contexts should be given consideration because they provide "support" or exert "stress" over how ethnic and racial identity unfolds among young adults (2014, p. 30). The macrosystem, the most expansive of Brofenbrenner's five contextual components that impact student development, is particularly relevant to how global and national trends such as immigration influence the identity development of immigrant students. While earlier scholars of immigrants presupposed that immigrations entailed a clean break with immigrant home countries' identities and relationships, and hence viewed immigrant experiences solely within the

social, cultural, political, and economic milieu of the receiving countries, recent studies show immigrants maintain identifications with their native homelands and engage in transnational linkages and networks that enable immigrants "sustain familial, economic, cultural, and political ties and identities that span borders" (Leitner, 2004, p. 44).

The macrosystem interacts with the following two components of the context—the exosystem and mesosystem—which include educational institutions, communities, and neighborhoods. Brofenbrenner's theory focuses on the interactive relationships and "linkages" between these systems, and the effect that these interactions have on the development of students. In examining how college students answer questions relating to their multiple identities, the macrosystem is the most pertinent aspect of the social-ecological model as it encompasses "culture, social conditions, and historical realities" (Jones & Abes, 2014, p. 180). College students of ethnic and racial minorities "cannot construct their identities separate from the realization about how they are treated" by the wider society, and as such, scholars of student development "must pay attention to how these larger structures, styles, and environments affect students" (Jones & Abes, 2014, p. 180).

The recognition of the sociopolitical climate as important factors in investigating the identity formation of college students is of particular use in the case of Somali students, especially as Muslims and immigrants in a time when political and social discourse is marked by hostility toward Islam and antipathy towards immigrants. The rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia impacts the identity formation processes by stigmatizing and threatening the identities of its victims (Samari, 2016). To cope with these pernicious

influences, the stigmatized minorities might be forced to discount the discrimination they face, or increase or decrease their group identification (Major & O'Brien, 2005). In any one of these scenarios, the role that historical and sociopolitical conditions play in shaping identities should be considered.

Microsystem refers to the person-to-person interactions that impact the development of the identity of the individual. It includes the interpersonal relations such as family, peers, and other social networks that play an important role in the forming and content of the identity of young adults. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1993) notes that the microsystem includes "social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment" (p. 15).

Family is the most impactful aspect of the microsystem in terms of its influence on identity development, as it is the "most important proximal social context that guides ERI [ethnic and racial identity] formation" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013, p. 30). This is the case because the family functions as an indispensable vehicle to transmit the traditions and norms that help children adapt to their social contexts (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Among many young African immigrants, family becomes a place to find answers to questions relating to identity formation. As Rasmussen, Chu, Akinsulure-Smith and Keatley (2013) note in their study, as "traditional, socially conservative modes of resolving family conflict transposed across migration into the more liberal and state-oriented familial context of the United States," the stage is set for a conflict between the emerging identities and the old ones (p. 185). For Somali females, in particular, for whom

family becomes the site where gender roles and patriarchal ethos are enforced, their struggle to find a space for their identity in the face of patriarchy at home and racism and xenophobia in the wider community becomes the defining feature of their identity (Kapteijns, 1999).

The most proximate aspect of Brofenbrenner's social-ecological theory is the individual. The individual is considered as having interactions with the other layers of the system in the negotiations of identity construction (Brofenbrenner, 1993). Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) argue that "it is important to consider that the specific actors and interactions present within any particular context are likely to engage or disengage certain dimensions of an individual's" ethnic and identity development (p. 31). The centrality of ethnic and racial identity of the students has varying levels of intensity depending on the specific context in which the individual lives (Brewer, 1991). Brewer argues that people have simultaneous needs to be connected or "deindividuated" and be independent or "distinctive" of particular identity-based groups (1991). The fine line "between deindividuation and distinctiveness is useful because it facilitates an understanding of the reasons why ERI [ethnic and racial identity] may be salient and adaptive in certain contexts but not in others" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 31).

Framing ethnic and racial identity development of Somali college students

As young adults transition to college environments, their intellectual capacity for comprehending race and ethnicity in shaping people's circumstance puts in motion a process of exploration of ethnic and racial identity, and internalization of the values associated with that identity (Quintana, 1998). This exploration is instrumental in

assisting "individuals as they grapple with answering the question 'Who am I?' which is considered a key developmental task of adolescence" (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 25).

The two integrated frameworks offer useful explanations of how different dimensions of identity and the larger contextual factors such history of immigration, political climate, and institutional cultures impact the identity of students. The combination of the model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) and Broffenbrenner's social-ecological model offers an integrative framework. This combination accounts for social identity theories of race and ethnicity as well as socially constructed identities of culture and religion, and the impact of immediate and distant contextual factors of family, community, school, political, social, and historical realities of immigrant college students like Somalis. The integration of MMDI and the social-ecological model fills a gap in the literature on immigrant college students. A number of researchers have noted that although there has been an abundance of studies that have investigated college students' social identities of race and ethnicity, there has been a scarcity of research that incorporates the multifaceted immediate and distal contexts that shape the development and saliences of the identities of first and second-generation immigrant college students. Kim and Diaz contend that there is an absence of literature "on incorporating social identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) into student development research and practices for the immigrant student population" (2013, p.110). They note that the formation of multiple dimensions of identity "continues through early adulthood and is shaped and reshaped as individuals experience unfamiliar situations and assume new roles and responsibilities" (p. 110).

Underlying most of the research on identity development is the assumption that the end-goal of identity work is the attainment of a coherent, synthesized, and consistent sense of self. Some postmodern theorists critiqued the notion of stable personal identity as social constructs imposed on the individual. As Gergen (1991), observes, ‘‘in place of the enduring and identifiable self, we find fragmentation and incoherence … the postmodern sensibility questions the concept of ‘true’ or ‘basic’ self, and the concomitant need for personal coherence or consistency” (p. 172–178). In studies on Laotian immigrants in Minnesota, Ngo (2009) found that her participants’ “practices produce identities that are ambiguous and conflictual” (p. 217). Further, she noted that the “incommensurability of these students’ identities cannot be accommodated within discourse of singular or even within discourses of plural identities.” In another study on the identity formation of minority Orthodox Jewish students in Israel, Schachter (2014) concluded that that the paramount objective of students was not to reconcile the contradictions in the different aspects of their identities which encompassed elements of religious orthodoxy and permissive sexual mores, but a celebration of it. The configuration of their identities was not defined by “sameness and continuity’’ but by the “thrill of dissonance” (p. 190).

Despite the debate over the universality of identity models, I chose the integrated framework of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) and Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological theory to structure the study of how identity development of Somali college students unfolds during their college years. The two integrated models provide a framework for conceptualizing the impact of contextual

environments, policies, trends, and institutions on the shape and content of ethnic and racial identity development of college students (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, 1993; Cross, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Phinney, 1993). Most importantly, the framework, despite the questions of its universality, is indispensable in studying college student experiences because it serves, as Strayhorn (2016) notes, a tool to uncover "that which might otherwise go hidden, concealed or too blurred to be captured with clarity" (p. 21), and a mechanism for improving the "rigor of study by linking together in a logical (or at least, theatrically) connected whole what might otherwise be seen as random, isolated facts" (p. 23).

Chapter 3: Method and Research Design

This study on the identity development of Somali college students was approached from a constructivist paradigm approach using a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory conducted from a constructivist epistemological paradigm is particularly appropriate for investigating the formation of identity and contextual environments that shape and influence it (Charmaz, 2006). Framed by Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model, this qualitative study will enable the researcher to understand the relationship between identity, context, and college student experiences in order to create a body of knowledge which is currently missing from the literature on college student identity development.

The goal of the qualitative approach is to produce descriptive data collected or observed from participants of the research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Unlike quantitative studies which investigate representative samples of the broader population, qualitative research aims to obtain deeper insights about specific events or experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Researchers who use qualitative approaches need to address the issue and the context of the research and how qualitative research is fitting and appropriate for such an inquiry (Conrad and Serlin, 2011, p. 276). Qualitative research inquiry, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) is:

> A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and

> memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative research studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

As Crotty (2011) illustrates, qualitative researchers should have a clear research design and procedure that defines and informs the inquiry. The design and procedure of the research outline the philosophical justifications and procedural steps that guide different stages of the research (Crotty, 2011). In addition, the questions regarding mechanisms the investigator puts in place in order to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the research as well as the inherent bias in researcher's positionality must be fully addressed (Creswell, 2011).

Epistemology – Social Constructivism

Qualitative research views nature of reality as socially constructed (Denzin, 1978). The guiding epistemological perspective of the proposed dissertation is social constructivist. Unlike positivistic or post-positivistic inquiries, research conceived in a social constructivism paradigm do not start with a deductive hypothesis or theory but inductively generate theory (Crotty, 1998). The paradigm of social constructivism is suitable for this study which examines examining the identity development of Somali college students by using grounded theory. Social constructivism emphasizes "how individuals construct their lives" and assumes that "reality is more relative and locally situated and constructed than a positivist would contend" (Toma, 2011, p. 267).

This dissertation is framed by grounded theory methodology. A key criterion for grounded theory is that the researcher needs to be flexible in order to allow the emergence of fresh insights on the phenomenon being studied and avoid imposing preconceived notions on participants' lived experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory systemically analyzes data from social research in order to uncover the underlying theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is a particularly useful methodology of study for situations where there is little existing body of literature (Goulding, 1998). Due to the scarcity of literature about immigrant college students in general and Somali college students in particular, grounded theory is an appropriate method as it relies more on data generated through interviews rather than exhaustive review of existing literature (Charmaz, 2006; Citizens League, 2009; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Kim & Diaz, 2013). This study uses the constructivist grounded theory as one of the three main schools of grounded theory. In a constructivist grounded theory, the researcher and participants "co-construct" the emerging theory, as noted by Charmaz (2000):

> "The grounded theorist's analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. The story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed." (p.15).

Constructivist grounded theory is rooted in the social constructivism paradigm Charmaz (2007), the epistemological stance that this study adopts. Although grounded theorists differ about the objectivity of the researcher, they agree that grounded theory

"has specific procedures" that should be followed during the data collection and analyses stages which researchers need to follow (Corbin & Straus, 1990, p. 6). Researchers are expected to exercise a degree of "flexibility" while upholding the procedures in order to maintain "rigor" of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 6). The generated theory is guided by a process known as constant comparison. During the data collection and analysis, the researcher is expected to interpret the collected data and compare it to the emerging codes and categories in order to see whether these categories support the theory (Creswell, 2013). The process of repeatedly comparing collected information to the developing codes is essential in finding the optimal congruity between categories. According to Lillemor Halber (2006), constant comparison means:

> That every part of data, i.e. emerging codes, categories, properties, and dimensions as well as different parts of the data, are constantly compared with all other parts of the data to explore variations, similarities and differences in data. Constant comparative method of grounded theory is strict enough to be helpful to the researcher in exploring the content and meaning of the data, but not saddled with so many strict rules to be too rigid for grounded theory researcher (p. 143).

Charmaz (2014) recommends that the comparisons should be undertaken during the memo-writings. Memo-writing, which will be explained later in this chapter, allows the researcher to document the initial insights and reflections.

Data collection

The theoretical justification for data collection procedures in grounded theory is rooted in the naturalist paradigm. Researchers who subscribe to naturalist paradigm

"explore complete situations and problems using a variety of techniques" such as in-depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 28). Data collection in qualitative research encompasses sampling, selecting participants, and building rapport with participants of the research (Creswell, 2011). This dissertation project used in-depth interviews as a method of collecting data. Participants were advised about the informed consent and asked to review the protocol in Appendix A as stipulated by the guidelines of the Institutional Review Bureau (IRB). Once informed consent steps were completed, participants who agreed to proceed with their participation were asked to provide a 60- to 90-minute interview. The interview consisted of the 11 questions found in Appendix B. Following the interview, participants were asked to take a brief demographic survey.

All identifying information was withheld to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, informed consent agreements were explained and presented to the participants of the study in accordance with the guidelines of the Institutional Review Bureau (IRB).

Research Procedure

Theoretical sampling. The key factor in selecting a sample for a grounded theory is that study subjects should be able to make a contribution to the process of building the theory (Creswell, 2012). The process of selecting such participants is known as "theoretical sampling" (Creswell, 2012, p. 155).

In theoretical sampling the objective is not to attain a representative sample of the population being studied. Rather, sampling serves in support of the process of building the theory. According to Charmaz (2006), it is not uncommon to have the researcher

going back to the field to develop an insight and create new codes and categories that play an important role in the generation of theory. During the course of the interviews, I had to follow up on particular insights from the interviews and develop them further. The follow up questions were strategically used to develop a topic or theme that one or more of the interviewees shared. For example, when a participant emphasizes the pride they have in their ethnicity in response to the question "to what extent are you connected to Somalia and how has that shaped who you are," the follow up question of "how does that pride in your heritage shapes who you are as a Somali college student" would be asked.

Selection of participants. In grounded theory research, Charmaz, who originated constructivist grounded theory, does not specify particular number of interviewees but recommends around 25 as a target sample size for studies aiming for "modest claims" in order to attain a "theoretical saturation" (2006, p.114). Theoretical saturation is defined as the point of research where no fresh insights emerge and the codes that make up the theory are well developed (Charmaz, 2006). As previously stated, since there are very few studies on the experiences of Somali college students, the claims that this study will make will be modest and tentative. However, if the researcher deems essential, additional participants could be selected during the data analysis phase in order to seek further insight or elaborate particular concepts integral to the construction of the theory. This was the case during the interviews with the participants of this dissertation project. Further participants were selected until saturation of the emerging themes was attained.

A key selection criterion for a grounded theory is that the participants must have experienced a "central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 136). The Somali students on

whom this research focused met that criteria because their undergraduate college experiences affected the formation of their identities. College culture is a consciousness raising experience that coincides with the human development stage when a coherence sense of personhood and overarching identity emerges among adolescents and young adults (Syed, 2011).

The population for this study consisted of all undergraduate students who are 18 years old or over and identify themselves as being of Somali descent at the University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities. Participants were recruited at the monthly meeting of the Somali Student Association (SSA) at the University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities. Of the over 200 Somali students who are in the Association's listserv, about 70 show up for the organization's monthly events, according to the president of SSA (Najma Yusuf, personal communication, November 4, 2014).

Recruitment. Over the last four years, the researcher has been attending the social and cultural activities of the Somali Student Association (SSA). This allowed him to become familiar and develop a rapport with members of SSA and its officers. Upon receiving the approval of Institutional Review Bureau (IRB), the researcher contacted the officers of the Somali Student Association at the University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities with the goal of recruiting research subjects who are undergraduate Somali students at the University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Additionally, the researcher attended the meeting of the Somali Student Association and invited members to participate in the study. After attending the meeting of the Somali Student Association, the researcher sent an email to members of the Association who are undergraduate

students, 18 years old or over and identified themselves as Somali descent at the University of Minnesota, Twin-Cities and asked them to participate in the research. Additional participants were recruited from the Coffman Student Union center where Somali students tended to socialize and congregate. Altogether, 41 students who met the criteria participated in the research. Of these, 21 were females and 18 were males. A detailed description of participants will be provided in chapter 4.

The researcher informed students that participants would receive a $20.00 gift card for their participation. In addition, the researcher collected the contact information of the students who agreed to participate in the study in order to schedule interview appointments.

Data analysis

Preparing data from in-depth interviews requires transcribing data. As Rubin and Rubin (2011) note, the transcripts of the data need to contain the questions and answers of the in-depth interview in verbatim. The transcription process is indispensable in ensuring the integrity of the data and tracking the details and insights from particular interviewees. If the transcription is done by a third party, especially words, silences, and inaudible phrases must be noted as this will help the researcher decipher such statement in the context of the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The transcription of the data was followed by the analysis stage. In order to analyze data, following the guidelines of grounded theory, memos, coding, and categories that ultimately lead to the generation of theory were created (Charmaz, 2006).

Memos. Grounded theory researchers undertake memo writing throughout the process of collection and analysis of data. Memo writing enables researchers to compose ideas and thoughts that can be used in the analytical phase of the data (Charmaz, 2006). Agra (1980) recommended that the researcher should read the transcripts and pay attention to details in order to get a "sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (p. 103). During the initial reading, the researcher should write memos on the margins. These brief memos help the research document thought and insights that transpire during the reading of the transcript (Creswell, 2012). Charmaz (2006) suggest that during writing memos, the researcher is able to:

> compare incidents indicated by each category, integrate categories by comparing them and delineating their relationships, delimit the scope and range of the emerging theory by comparing categories with concepts, and write the theory, which you may compare with other theories in the same area of study (p. 84).

In addition to making the grounded theory analysis "progressively stronger, clearer, and more theoretical," the process of memo writing highlights deficiencies or areas where there are needs for further sampling and the general direction of the theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 115). Though the length and rigor of the memos may vary, their usefulness for the construction of theory is immeasurable as they help the research to reflect how participants' perspective is relatable to research's audience (Creswell, 2012). During this dissertation project, contemporaneous memos were created following each interview. The length of each memo was one to two pages. Memos were helpful in developing general outlines of possible interpretations and thoughts. Once the list of

codes was developed, the codes were expanded into the outlines of possible interpretations and thoughts. This outline drew from fresh insights from the interviews.

Coding. Initial reading of the transcripts of interviews was followed by coding (Creswell, 2012). Coding was the next stage in the analysis of the data as it moved the focus of the research from "from description toward conceptualization of the description" (Charmaz, 2002, p. 683). Coding entails "aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code" from various sources of data (Creswell, 2012, p. 184). Charmaz (2006) recommends initial coding of the data as a mechanism to help researcher avoid injecting his or her own pre-existing notions into the data. By focusing on the participants' worldview as opposed to assuming that the researcher and the participants share similar perceptions of reality, initial coding is critical to avoiding drawing hasty conclusions from the data (Charmaz. 2006). Initial coding also serves as a way of "winnowing" the data because not all the collected data was used in this qualitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Coding served as the foundation of data analysis as it formed the basic components that gave rise to categories and broader themes of the theory (Emerson, 1983). Grounded theorists conduct a "line by line" coding that assists them to examine the data and are integral in depicting the intended expressions of research subject (Charmaz, 2006). Most importantly, coding gave the data organizational structure and thematic coherence (Emerson, 1983).

Codes can be labeled in several different ways. This dissertation project followed Creswell's (2012) suggestion to use *in vivo*, which is the process of using the descriptions

that participants make about their experiences and the phenomenon under study to label the codes. Other code labels might be borrowed from social science literature or the researcher might create labels that are most appropriate in conveying the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2012).

Categories. Categories emerged from process of deconstructing the qualitative data in order to find connecting themes among codes (Creswell, 2012). The connection between particular codes is called "axial coding" as the relationship is centered on an "axis of a category" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Categories, according to Rubin and Rubin, provide an "explanation of why something happened, or what something means, or how the interviewee feels about the matter" (2012, p. 194). Codes that were related each other were grouped into categories.

Categories are made up of codes that capture "processes, actions, or interactions" (Creswell, 2011, p. 186). The researcher narrows down the number of categories to a "manageable set of themes" that are written into the final narrative (Creswell, 2012). Rubin and Rubin offer four guidelines that the researcher could use in order to winnow the qualitative information to reasonable number of categories (2012). First, they recommend that the researcher start with categories that were explicitly mentioned during the interviews. Second, the researcher should select the categories that interviewees "evoked." Third, the researcher should look for the categories that are based in the reviewed literature that might show up in the collected data. And fourth, the categories selected might suggest "closely related" categories that could be marked with the purpose of using them in the construction of the theory (2012).

Following the selection of the initial set of categories, the most salient categories from the data were selected (Creswell, 2012). These categories were the ones participants discuss repeatedly or categories of "particular conceptual interest because it seems central to the processes being" investigated in the research. As suggested by Creswell (2012), the selection of most salient categories was followed by additional review of the data meant to develop "axial coding." Creswell (2012) defines the axial coding a re-examining the data for ideas and codes that are related to the "central phenomenon" (p. 196).

The axial coding was followed by "selective coding" which are more "abstract, general and simultaneously, analytically incisive than of the initial codes that they subsume (Charmaz, 2006, p. 764). Selective coding was instrumental in synthesizing the vast amount of data and searching for links and "relationships between categories based on a priori theoretical framework (e.g., causes, context, ordering)" (Creswell, 2011, p. 197).

Finally, direct quotes were used to present the findings. As Corden and Sainsbury argue, reporting direct quotes in presenting the findings of qualitative research is integral in:

> a) presenting discourse as the matter of enquiry, b) presenting quotations as evidence for the interpretations, c) presenting spoken words for explanation…for readers to understand complex processes by which people made sense of their lives, d) illustrating themes emerging from the researcher's own interpretation, and e) deepen[ing] understanding…and offer readers greater depth of understanding (2006, p. 11).

Model. The last part of the data analysis involved creating the model from codes and categories. The creation of the model in grounded theory research involves "abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2011, p. 187). The categories were organized into conceptualizations that interpret data into a model (Creswell, 2011, p. 187). According to Charmaz (2014), the grounded theory model arrived at through a process of constant comparison which involves comparing the similarities and differences of emerging themes in order to define and refine the underlying meaning behind the data. Charmaz (2014) notes that constant comparison method is a form of analyzing data which:

> [G]enerates successively more abstract concepts and theories through inductive processes of comparing data with data, data with code, code with category, category with category, and category with concept. In the last stages of the analysis, researchers compare their major categories with those in relevant scholarly literature (p. 342).

Comparing different components of the data was helpful in revealing the attributes and varieties of different categories. In addition to advancing the distinctions between categories, the constant comparative method of analysis was indispensable in "raising the level of abstractions" of the emergent analyses of the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 342).

In summary, the grounded theory approach provides the researcher with instructions that assist him/her a) investigate a "social and social psychological processes," b) guide the collection of the data, c) conduct systemic analysis of the data,

and d), build "an abstract theoretical framework that explains the studied process (Charmaz, 2003, p. 103). The emerging theory is intended to emphasize understanding the phenomenon under research rather than for its explanatory powers (Charmaz, 2006).

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is different from its quantitative counterpart in nature and therefore requires a different way of determining its rigor (Toma, 2011). Despite the essential difference between the two approaches, qualitative inquiry has achieved legitimacy in terms of its soundness as a method of study (Charmaz, 2006). Toma (2011) contends that the evaluating qualitative research by standards of quantitative research is "inappropriate" as it undermines the objective of the work done within the qualitative tradition. The standards measured in quantitative research are steeped in positivistic traditions and are measured through quantifiable data (Toma, 2011). Qualitative researchers use more naturalistic approaches as mechanisms for validation for their findings (Creswell, 2011). Instead of using "the language of positivistic research" such as validity, reliability, and objectivity, they aim for "trustworthiness" established through standards of "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "conformability" (Creswell, 2012, p. 246).

Credibility in qualitative research refers to "the degree to which it rings true to natives and colleagues in the field" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 21). Demonstrating credibility is one of the most important factors in ensuring the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2003) measures credibility to the degree that "findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the accounts of the

reader" (pp. 195-196). Miles and Huberman (1994), on the other hand, argue that credibility in qualitative research follows from contextualizing findings in a considerable and reasonable fashion in a way that accomplishes a "vicarious presence" for the audience and triangulating evidence from data, presence of alternative illuminations, and findings that research subjects find truthful. The triangulation is achieved by conducting "member checking" which is achieved "through later contact with the key research participants to test the evolving analytical categories generated by the researcher" (Toma, 2011, p. 272). During the analyses of the data, I "member checked" the emerging findings with research participants to ensure that the findings rang true and accurate from their perspectives. I could not meet with participants as a group in order to safeguard their confidentiality and therefore I invited them via email to meet me to discuss the findings of the research. Of the 41 participants invited, 8 of them agreed to have individual meetings with me. These 8 agreed that the overall findings were reflective of their college experiences.

Transferability of the findings is another mechanism of establishing the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research. It refers to the ability of the qualitative research to be instrumental "in illuminating another context" (Toma, 2011, p. 272). Qualitative research is transferable to different contexts to the extent that they are framed in terms of the "big picture" and examine "holistically the setting to understand linkages among systems" and their capacity to put data in "historical context in order to understand how institutions and roles evolved" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 197). Transferability can be achieved with detailed and rich descriptions of the data (Creswell, 2012). During the

data analysis stage, long quotation blocks were included to illustrated the detail and richness of the descriptions of the data.

The third method of ensuring rigor and trustworthiness of the research is meeting the dependability criteria. Dependability entails being flexible and adaptive to the research setting and protocol (Toma, 2011). The researcher needs to be attuned to the unexpected changes that transpire during both the collection and analysis of the data because in qualitative research, "the social world is always being constructed" and therefore rendering the notion of replication impractical (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 194). According to Toma (2011), even the "research questions in qualitative research, although posed at the outset, tend to evolve in response to emerging data," forcing the researcher to refine the questions to suit the emergent data and themes (p. 273). Dependability was achieved by adapting follow up question to the emergent themes.

The final mechanism of helping ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research is the concept of conformability. Qualitative studies aim for conformability rather than objectivity which is unattainable given the unavoidable biases that come with the positionality of qualitative researchers (Toma, 2011). Rather than the detached objectivity expected in quantitative research, qualitative researchers attempt to conformability, defined as "relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases – at the minimum, explicitness about the inevitable biases that exist" (p. 278). This means that the preponderance of "findings and conclusions depend on the participants more than on the inquirer" (Toma, 2011, p. 275).

Researcher positionality

Positionality refers to the bias inherent in the researcher's ability to reflect on his or her place in the context study and how his or her frame of references influence data collection and analysis (England, 1994). Researchers should maintain reflexivity throughout the research process in a fashion that brings transparency to how the investigator's background and perspectives could potentially influence different stages of research (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

My identity as a male Somali doctoral candidate offers both challenges and strengths. My familiarity with the Somali culture and experiences and my position as an insider can give me invaluable insights and access to participants. However, this familiarity can potentially put me at risk of drawing premature conclusions from the data or obscure me from important insights which could illuminate the process of identity development of Somali college students.

To minimize the effect of biases emanating my positionality, I adapted the concept of "bracketing" in every step of the research. Bracketing, as used in qualitative research, is a mechanism designed to "mitigate the potentially deleterious effect of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 80). Bracketing is accomplished by keeping memos that allow the researcher to reflect the thoughts and "feelings about the research endeavor" throughout the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Being transparent about these "hunches and presuppositions," argue Tufford and Newman, instead of "attempting to stifle them in the name of objectivity or immersion, may free the researcher to engage more extensively

with the raw data" as this not only reduces personal biases but also enhances the rigor of the research (2012, p. 86).

Conclusion

Framed by the social-ecological model, the study examines how the identity development of college students is shaped by the multiple contextual environments in which the lives of these students are embedded. Social-ecological models consider the complexity and multiplicity of factors that influence the development of young adults and therefore provides a useful framework to conceptualize the ethnic and racial identity development of immigrant college students (Kim & Diaz, 2013). The social-ecological model is integral to understanding the experiences and development of immigrant college students as it provides a conceptual framework to understand familial, communal, and institutional issues that immigrant students interact with as well as the multiple contexts in which these interactions take place (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

This qualitative study uses a constructivist grounded theory methodology to investigate the identity development of Somali college students. The methodology chapter also presented mechanisms intended to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the research and a statement on the researcher's positionality and reflexivity and how the biases inherent in such a position were mitigated.

Chapter 4: Findings

The dissertation explores how the overlapping contextual environments in which the lives of Somali college students impact the development of their racial and ethnic identities. In addition to racial and ethnic themes, two additional salient themes of religion and gender emerged from the data. This chapter presents the four major themes that emerged from data analysis of the interview transcripts. These themes are racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms. Each dimension will be discussed in relation to its intersections with the other dimensions and the contextual factors such as familial, societal, institutional and collegiate, and historical contexts that shape it as well as the personal agency deployed by participants as they negotiate, contest, and construct identity through the course of their college education. The themes that emerged from data analyses depict the unique space that Somali students occupy, the multiple environmental contexts that shape their identity, and the intersections of the multiple identities that they embody.

Description of participants

In this section, I will present a brief description of the participants. Due to participants' unique demographic characteristics, I will be as brief as possible to avoid compromising participants' confidentiality. A detailed profile of each participant might unwittingly reveal their identity. For example, many of the students who participated were the only ones in unique majors. A combination of their year in college, major, and gender might be sufficient in identifying them. Hence, in this section, I will provide a brief general description of participants which should be sufficient to provide important

aspects of campus context but limited enough to safeguard their confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be applied for participants when direct quotes are used.

The 41 participants were undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. University of Minnesota Twin Cities is a large Land Grant research university. The university is home to over 30,000 undergraduate students and over 16,000 graduate and professional students. Minority students constitute about 18% of undergraduate students. American Indian students make 1.4% of the student body while Asians make 5.3% of students. Black students which participants of the study identify as their racial identity make 4.6% of students. Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders make 0.3% of students whereas Hispanics make 3.2% of the student body (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2017). Data from Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) indicates that the total number of undergraduate Somali students at the University of Minnesota to be around 400 students (2015). A gender breakdown was not available from this data.

The interviews took place in private rooms at the university libraries. After each interview, each participant answered a brief demographic questionnaire. Of the 41 students who participated, 23 were females and 18 were males. Of the 41 participants, 38 were either second generation immigrants or 1.5 generation, meaning they arrived in the United States as children. The remaining three were first generation immigrants who arrived in the United States as teenagers.

Four males and seven females were graduating seniors. Another six males and nine females were juniors while seven males and five females were sophomores. The

remaining one male and two females were first-year students. In terms of their area of studies, 19 majored in Liberal Arts, another nine were Biological Sciences majors while seven students were Education majors. Another three students were in Engineering majors. The remaining three participants were the only ones in their area of study and therefore the majors will not be identified here as this may compromise their confidentiality.

Most participants lived with their families as is a tradition among Somali families to have children live with their families until they get married (Abdullahi, 2001). All 23 female participants lived with their families, and all but three male participants also lived with their families. Of the three males who were living independent of their families, one lived in the college dorms while the other two lived in apartments.

As a group, all members were involved in student life activities. Most of them were involved in either the Somali Student Association, the Muslim Student Association, or the Black Student Union. Many were part of all three organizations. Additionally, several participants were involved in academic student clubs such as engineering and science clubs. All 41 participants described themselves as Somalis, Blacks, and Muslims.

Encountering Racialized Experiences

The microsystem environmental factors in Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model, such as schools and families, and microsystem components such as cultural attitude, provide a framework to analyze how dynamic and rich contextual environments increase the salience of racial identities relative to the multiplicity of identities outlined in the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identities (MMDI) that Somali college students

bring to the campus. The participants of this dissertation project were mostly second-generation Somalis who were born in the United States or "1.5-generation" who came to this country at a very young age. Of the 41 Somali college students who participated in this research, only two came to America in their teens. This may explain why as a whole, their racial identities were more salient than their religious identities. The majority of participants in this study described racially influenced experiences of bigotry in their college settings, institutional practices, and peer interactions and how these experiences acted as catalysts in the development of their racial consciousness. Participants also discussed how other aspects of their identities, such as religion and ethnicity, interacted with their racial identity and informed the formation of their Black identity. These identities contextualized the identity negotiations of participants.

The subthemes in this section include racializing experiences of racism in society, developing a sense of race through interactions with institutions where imposed racial identity is enacted on institutional documents, and the increased salience of racial identity and its intersection with their other identities in the context of campus. In asserting their racial identity, participants strongly identified themselves as Black, in part as a negation strategy in the light of the racializing experiences to which they were subjected. By identifying themselves as Black, participants were able to place their lived-in experiences in the broader struggle for racial equality in America and give a new meaning to their understanding of notions of citizenship and solidarity. The same was not true for their parents who tended to be reluctant in foregrounding their racial identity and downplayed their experiences with racism in America. The generational divide, gleaned from

participants' characterizations of their parents, on centrality of race in America mirrored the divergent views on the meaning of religion and the views on gender equality expressed by Somali college students.

Societal racialization and racial identity. Some participants traced their earliest encounters with racializing experience and the formation of their racial identity in the context of the other primary identities of their family in their childhood. A female participant, Hodan, recalled when her family moved from Atlanta, GA to St. Cloud, MN and the racial animus directed at her family saying, "I hated St. Cloud, I'm so happy we moved, but really the worst place, full of racism, my uncle had a store, and they had a, they spray painted, go back to your country, and they're like the "N" word, and it's like, wow, it felt like, just another reminder we are black Somalis again, we are black, to white people." Here, Ruweda, is highlighting how the otherizing of her racial identity at the hands of the dominant White society is the fulcrum on which the saliency of that identity rests. She further noted that she "went through a lot of discrimination in St. Cloud, which is literally the worst place ever, and they're still having problems."

Another participant, Warda, shared a similar story of watching her parents called racial slurs and how her sense of racial identity has been forged through these racializing experiences. She connected her discussion of racism to the experiences of the broader African American community with respect to race and racism, noting that the day-to-day experiences of Black people is defined by race and racism is a fact of life, saying "all the micro-aggressions, they start building up and you start like noticing that, like, I was nine years old when a woman called my dad a Nigger at a drive through." This made her

realize that she will always be treated on the basis of her skin color and made her relate to the experiences of victims of racism, noting that "ever since then I'm just, it makes you realize that people just hate you for existing" and that these incidents "reminds me of suffering because all Black people have gone [through] in this country.

Participants described their interface with law enforcement agencies and how racial profiling experiences created solidarity between Black immigrants and African Americans. They noted these experiences were instrumental in the formation of their racial identity. In talking about how racialized experiences and pop culture influence the racial identity of Somali college students like him, Salim observed:

> They categorically face the same issues as many other Black people in America and so they identify with them as like oh, I get stopped by police too, oh, people follow me around in stores too. You know, these types of connections, oh, we like the same music, we look a lot more similar than everyone else. So those are the things that create a connection, a bond that's what connects them to their racial identity.

Participants displayed insights into the role that their communities' immigration to the United States has played in impacting their sense of identity. A female participant, Sagal, commented on how the changes in the environmental processes in Somalia impacted the relative salience of community's multiple identities, pointing out:

> I think for a lot of Somali people, they don't understand they're Black. most certainly in a nation like this, back in predominantly Black environment you're Somali, you go by your ethnicity not by your race but in this environment, you go

> by your race. So, you're Black that means you deal with Black problems in American. You deal with, racism, you deal with the assumptions made about your community that you always assumed to be poor, assumed to be not high functioning uneducated, will probably not even have a job that is of high quality, probably not be a professional.

College and racial identity. The development of racial identity is not only impacted by their off-campus racialized experiences but it is also shaped by the racial dynamics on campus. The racialized experiences that take place on campus are critical in understanding the salience of racial identity with respect to other dimensions of identity that students bring to campus.

Analyzing the data revealed two ways in which on-campus racialized experiences impacted Somali students' racial identity development. The first thread that emerged from interviews is about the institutionalized hostile campus atmosphere which students experienced through their interactions with campus authorities. The thread revolves around an Islamic cultural center at the Coffman Student Union building, where many Muslim students gravitate towards as a safe space that shields them from hostile campus atmosphere. However, the center is dominated by Muslim students who are either of Middle Eastern or South East Asian descent and Somali students interviewed for this dissertation project felt a feeling of anti-Blackness emanating from non-Black Muslims at the center. The racially charged fissures between Black Muslims on one hand and Middle Eastern and South Asian Muslims on the other hand served as a catalyst in the racial identity salience among a majority of the interviewed Somali students. As Jones and

McEwen argue, the salience of particular social identity depends on how that identity is privileged and otherized (2000). The layered and textured racialized environments in campus made the racial dimension of the multiple identities of Somali college students underprivileged and as a result raised its salience. Participants of this dissertation project explained how the school environment informed their racial identity. Amin described that racial identity obscures other identities such as religion and ethnicity. He noted that in the college context, people's perceptions are largely based on one's identity, saying that "before people can get to know your other identities such as being Muslim or being Somali," college students base their perceptions on racial basis. Other participants noted that a college education was instrumental in understanding of the role of race in American society. Describing the evolution of her racial awareness, a female participant, Fahmo, commented how much she learned about the history of racism throughout the course of her college education, saying "I didn't know as much as I know now before I, I mean you experience these events but then you don't notice it until you learn about it." She contrasted this to her high school experience where she learned little about race relations, observing "I would say ignorant about it back in high school but now that I know more, that I've read and ya, I notice—I know, you see it more. Like it's more clear, before you didn't see it because you were ignorant about it, now you see it."

School setting racialization was not limited to the racialization treatments these students were subjected to but also their reaction and agency to combat racism. A female participant, Suban, stated that her social justice activities in high school were an important factor in the development of her Black identity, saying:

> To be entirely honest it wasn't until, my sophomore year of high school when I joined a social justice black box theater class, it was just an art class that we had, until I took that class and we started talking about injustices within our society and, that was around the time the hashtag Black Lives Matter started happening and so within that class I just, you know, micro aggressions that always happens, it's like subtle forms of racism and you always felt some sort of tension, you know? Like when people comment and say certain things or it's like back-handed compliment or it's, it just doesn't feel right. You're never, I don't know, I took that class and I was finally able to put names on the feelings that I've had, this is something that I'm making up, this is like, this is something that's there.

As the above two participants illustrate, a number of participants had a firm sense of their identity as Blacks in America and what that identity entails in a society where race remains the central organizing principle by the time they enrolled in college. These racializing experiences are formalized in the interactions that students have at different institutions where, as people of African descent, they disclose their racial identification as Blacks when filling out various institutional documents. This role that institutions play in codifying students' racial identification in government documents is reflected in Bronfenbrenner social-ecological model as the *Exosystem* (1993). As Renn argues, *Exosystems* tend to play a "role in students' awareness of racial identity" in that it makes students choose racial category in the racial menu of options on "institutional forms, state, and federal forms designed and distributed by administrators outside of students' immediate settings" (2003, p. 395). While acknowledging the cost of living with a

racialized identity, participant Beydan noted that there are institutional structures that remind you of your racial identity, saying that "I learned in college, more specifically that you can't undo your race, at the end of the day you're still Black, you still, when you're doing your form you'll still have to check Black."

Several participants discussed the hostile atmosphere created by the university. One participant, Amin commented on the university email system that reports crimes and how it impacts campus climate. He noted that the university highlights the racial identity of crime suspects only when they are Black saying "if a White person committed a crime, they never bothered to report this." He further noted that in contrast to this, the university crime reports which are sent to all students, often includes references of suspects who were Blacks, reinforcing the stereotypes against Blacks. Other participants particularly shared how they came to learn that racism on campus is a fact of life and that one has to adapt to it. Aragsan, pointing to the inevitability of racism on campus, said "you feel racism in college, especially when you're around a lot of White people, sometimes you will experience that racism and I feel like you just have to accept that you're Black and you have to be kind of proud of it, you know." Jamila, another participant described the experiences of being tokenized as a Black person, saying:

> It's because I always feel like an outsider, teachers talk about Black people and they look at you, like the whole stereotype like ok, just because I'm the only Black person here, I finally know everything about Black people or people of color, and so on.

As previously noted, the importance of particular social identity raises with the degree that that identity is underprivileged (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and therefore contributed to the salience of racial identity of Somali students. Several participants discussed these dynamics of intersecting race and religious identities in the contextual environment of the student center. These different racialization experiences reflect how Muslims of different ethnic groups position themselves as political subjectivities as they grappled with hostile environments of Islamophobia and xenophobia will be explored in the next subtheme.

Intersections of race and religion in the context of college. As explained in the subtheme of "Societal Racialization and Racial Identity," Somali students endure racialization experiences in their daily lives and in their interactions with their peers in college setting. This subtheme examines the role of individual agency on the part of the participants and their motivations in identifying with the racial experiences of African Americans in general and struggles for equality in particular. Participants in this dissertation project described how Black popular culture and sports figures initially influenced their racial identity as Blacks and more importantly how the political enfranchisement was a key factor in their racial consciousness. Salim, one of participants of this dissertation study, noted that young Somali children not only face experiences of racial discrimination but they also consume the same cultural products, saying that:

> they're affected by what technology is there, what music they listen to, what shows they watch . . all these things affect them. And I think during that process of being affected at the same time they categorically face the same issues as many

> other Black people in America and so they identify with them as like oh, I get stopped by police too, oh, people follow me around in stores too. You know, these types of connections, oh, we like the same music, we look a lot more similar than everyone else. So those are the things that create a connection, a bond that's what connects them to their racial identity.

Another participant, Deeq, shared that growing [up] he was attracted by the glamour of Black sports figures and he aspired to be like them observing, "when I was younger and playing football or basketball or when I was growing up, it was cool to be African American." He further noted that it was not only the allure of identification with sports celebrities that shaped his racial identity, but that as he grew older, he developed a more sophisticated understanding of the racialized experiences that being a Black man in America entails.

Participants conceptualized their racial identity as a way of placing their resistance against the hegemonic racial hierarchies that define America at the center of the broader civil rights discourse. For the Somali college students who participated in this dissertation project, being Black not only enabled them to articulate their experiences of discrimination, but it also served to mobilize their Black identity in a political framework of resisting the racial inequalities they faced. They strategically asserted the racial identity aspect of their multiple identities in order to perform their Black identities within the context of campus politics. By subordinating their Muslim and Somali identity to their Black identity, they were able to couch their racial struggles in the language of civil rights and social justice movements, intensifying the salience of their Black identity in

the process. While this was empowering and liberating, it also magnified and compounded the intergenerational fault lines between Somali college students who were mostly second-generation immigrants and their parents who aspire for the continuation of strong ethnic identity.

Participants explained that identifying as Blacks, rather than Muslims or Somalis, in the highly-racialized context of campus environment is a political strategy that provides them with a civil rights framework and powerful notions of citizenship. One participant, Amin, explained his rationalization behind his solidarity with African Americans by contrasting his experience with that of White immigrants, saying "if you look at America, and you're an immigrant but you're still White, you still get absorbed into that whiteness, you're protected in American's whiteness." In this calculus, asserting his political subjectivities as a Black in America is justified as the mirror image of how European immigrants are enfranchised as White citizens, who enjoy the protections of the state and the law. Another participant, Deeq, described that asserting his racial identity over his religious and ethnic identity in the context of campus politics is strategic, noting:

> I think I choose one at a time. When I'm with a group of people I think I utilize my African American identity more than when I'm with another set of group I think my Somali American side comes up, I kind of pick and choose now that I think about it.

One of the participants, Libin, explained that in America, race and politics are intertwined and how that impacts her understanding of her ethnic identity as a Somali and her racial identity as a Somali, saying "being Black is political, being Somali is me being

me. I'm Somali and I never let somebody take that away from me like, oh, you're not Somali, you're Black and being Black in America is political but being Black other places in Africa, there's no such thing."

As one participant, Abas, explained the reasons that being Black is more politically palatable in the current sociopolitical context of the country relative to his other identities as a Somali and a Muslim because to be Black is to be enfranchised as a citizen whereas his other identities carry connotations of "foreignness," and are therefore vulnerable to Islamophobic and Xenophobic attacks. Explaining the differences between meanings ascribed to Somali and Black identity, he said:

> they mean two different things. So, like being Somali is usually like connotates with being a refugee, so a war-torn country mostly Muslim and like and it's like a different language, something foreign. Whereas being Black is not necessarily something foreign.

He further elaborated on his thinking of why being Black is qualitatively more powerful in terms of citizenship and resisting against racial discrimination, saying "because a lot of times people just connect Black as only seeing it as people who are African American who have been here from like the beginning of this country." Another participant, Issa, made further connections between her Black identity and African American history of racial struggle. Commenting on the pride she takes in being part of the racial struggle, she said "every time when I say that I'm Black I have this like strong pride in me because [African American], they're willing to like fight so that they can

have a better living standards and that's why I have like this image, this pride just to show that we never like give up and so."

The choices that Black and non-Black Muslim students make about confronting Islamophobia on campus reflects the different racialization of their experiences. Participants in this dissertation commented on how Middle Eastern students at the Muslim Student Center tended to highlight how Muslims were similar to the rest of the society and were willing to apologize for the terrorism activities committed in the name of Islam, whereas Somali students were more likely to assert their racial identity as Blacks and as such, their discourse around Islamophobia and the hostile campus climate are framed as racial grievances. Participants explained that this positioning allowed Somali students to escape from the implication that Muslim students were somehow responsible for these acts of terrorism. Commenting on how their racial background and the intersections of their racial and religious identities influence on how they confront hostile campus climate and the expectations to apologize for the terrorist activities carried in the name of Islam, Hodan, a female participant pointed out that "Black Muslims are unapologetic, they don't care, they do their thing. I feel like non-Black Muslims are always like well, '9/11 wasn't made by Muslims' so they, you know they always try to make excuses and try to feed to the non-Muslims." She contrasted this to how Black Muslims approach these issues saying "I feel like Somali people and Black, Somali Black people like, we were unapologetic so that's just something, like being non-Muslim." She went to elaborate the empowering aspect of casting her experiences in racial terms and

reframing the debate about the concern for Islamic terrorism and Islamophobia as a racial discourse, noting:

> Because I feel like when people will say, oh how does it feel being Muslim in college? They expect me to be like, oh, it's hard. It is hard but like I don't care what people think like for me hammdulillah [praise be to Allah], I don't know, my people are like that, we just do not care how other people see us and if they don't like us, like we're going to do our thing, like we're still going to go to school. We're still going to—we're not going to let it affect us, I'm not going to feel bad, I'm not going to feel sorry for actions that other people are doing who also share the same religion as me.

While the solidarity with the Black civil rights struggle positions Somali students to articulate their experiences in framework that strengthens their sense of citizenship, it sharpens the generational tension between them on matters relating to their identity. Participants shared that their parents do not share their embrace of their racial identity nor their enthusiasm for social justice activism. They noted that their parents view the relationship between the development of their racial identity as Blacks and their ethnicity as Somalis as a zero-sum game in that they fear Blackness will displace "Somaliness." Furthermore, their parents tend to downplay their racialized experiences and hence discount the need for activism and protest. One participant, Salim, reasoned Somali parents' tendency to distance themselves from the experiences of racism aimed towards African Americans by explaining that they do not interface with American society as much as their children who were born in America and therefore have a limited exposure

to the racializing experiences that influence their children's racial identity formation. Discussing this, she mentioned that "when someone is a kid and they grow up here, those things are affected by their environment….And I think during that process of being affected at the same time they categorically face the same issues as many other Black people in America. She further discussed that young Somalis identify with the experiences of other Blacks in America because of shared experiences of being "stopped by police" or followed "around in stores."

As illustrated by the quote from Salim, the salience of racial identity exacerbates the generational disconnect. The generational tension is further highlighted by differences in conceptualization of how American society and institutions work with respect to the issue of race. Somali parents, as related by participants of this dissertation, absorb the notions of "American dream" where if you work hard enough you will succeed in life. It is a notion where the experiences of structural racism are not seen as an impediment to one's progress, yet this is not an understanding of reality shared by their children. Sagal discussed this, saying:

> our parents sort of have that same mentality is that if you just kind of do what you're told, try to abide by the laws of the land, not of the criminal justice system by any means but more so like the societal understanding of things then you won't be targeted, people will overlook you. What they often don't realize is that it's really hard to be overlooked when you're Black and when other people see you and identify you with a history four hundred years old. So, you may not have been asked to be included in this but you're in it and so for a lot of us we're like if

> we're in it we're going to do what Somali people do best and we're going to fight in the sense of like we will be very passionate, we will be very driven and we will stand for what we think is right.

The reflections of both Salim and Sagal were a consistent theme throughout the interviews. Participants described different ways in which different generations of immigrants negotiate racial identities. As Salim illustrated, their parents arrived in America at a time when their identity was fully formed and therefore insist that their children to enact similar identity formation processes without taking the differences in contextual environments in which their lives and that of their children embedded into consideration. The generational tension regarding politics of race and racial identity is further exacerbated by the different approaches through which Somali parents and children cope with the challenges of racial stigmatization.

Additionally, the intersectionality of different aspects of students' identity show that religious identity intersects and amplifies racial identity among the participants. The intersections of racial identity and ethnic identity of Somali college students will be explored in the next section on the formation of diasporic identity among second generation Somali college students.

Diasporic Ethnic Identity

Diasporic ethnic identity emerged as a potent source of ethnic identity and solidarity among the participants of this dissertation project. This was particularly true in the context of their increasingly marginalized position in the social and political order of

the country where Islamophobia and xenophobia spiked with the rise of Donald Trump's candidacy and presidency.

In the next three subthemes, I will analyze the role of family, societal positionality and campus context in the formation of diasporic ethnic identity of the participants in the dissertation project. The first subtheme unpacks the workings of diasporic memory and family as a site to recreate memories of homeland and collective diasporic identity. The second subtheme deals with the relationship between a longing for return and participants' marginal positionality in the society. The third subtheme examines the processes through which participants integrate diasporic identity into their multiple identities in the context of college.

Family and exhibiting pride in diasporic identity. Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model suggests that microsystems such as the family are critical to the development of children as it is the context where most parent-child interactions take place, and therefore provides a dynamic context in which to examine the diasporic identity development of Somali students. Several participants in this dissertation project described how the role of memory and production of notions of "Somaliness," often narrated in nostalgic ways, factored into their construction of diasporic identity. They discussed the idealized stories their parents told about Somalia and how they have been tragically exiled from their homeland. These stories impacted participants in three ways: they instilled pride in their identity as Somalis, contributed to their yearning to return to Somalia someday, and motivated them to take ownership of their Somali identity by learning about Somali history and language. Pride in ethnic identity, desire to at some

undefined date return to homeland, and taking active steps such as improving their Somali language skills became foundations of their diasporic identity.

In discussing how the stories his family told him about Somalia and Somali culture connects him to his parents' homeland and shapes who he is today, Bile, pointed out how he has been able to relate to Somalia, even though he has never been there, saying:

> I'd say because of you know, my parents, you know just teaching us the heritage and what it's like to be a Somali individual it kind of connects us emotionally to [Somalia] because it's the way that I was brought up and the culture and what was around me, the environment in that but in a sense where I never went to see anything like it, I can be straight forward attached to it because you know it's something I don't know. But from what I heard, from what I see, from what I've been taught, or what I was around, I'm attached to it in that sense.

Participants discussed how the memories and stories their parents shared with them as they were growing up continue to influence their sense of ethnic identity. Suban shared how the stories her parents shared with her instilled in her a sense of pride in the strength of Somali people and their ability to overcome the ravages of war and dislocation, saying "I feel like regardless of whatever situation as a community we're put into, like Somali people are able to build themselves, you know, we've had the worse happen but you still see Somali people prospering."

The sense of pride in being Somali was shared by number of participants in answer to the question, “share five words that comes to your mind when you think about being Somali.”

The sense of pride in being Somali was not the only way families used what they remembered form their homeland. Idealized memories and romanticized stories about Somalia and its pre-civil war history served as an effective tool to kindle desire and a yearning to return to their parents’ homeland among children who were born in America or other countries where their parents lived as refugees. Participants expressed that these stories have left them wanting to visit the actual spaces which their parents described in their stories and in the process, has strengthened their sense of identity and membership in that imagined community. Observing how his parents and their stories influenced his strong identifications with Somalia, Warsame, noted:

> it developed because of how I grew up, my parents are obviously both Somali and then just the way I was raised that one day we’re going to go back. It’s been nineteen years, we never went back. I never went back but then, it’s just this attachment when they tell you those stories about your country, you’ve never been there but you feel some sort of attachment to it and it’s like that’s part of your blood, you’re DNA. So I feel like that’s my country at the end of the day and I have to do something.

He further went on to describe his sense of belonging to Somalia even though he has never been there and his sense of obligation to restore Somalia, saying “I’ve never been to Somalia but I feel like I belong there because that’s my homeland and it’s my

dream to go back, you know? And to help fix my country and make a real impact there, that would be real success for me, make an impact in my country." The notion of homeland and its restoration was a recurring theme among participants. Another participant, Khadija, said that her decision to pursue a PhD in history was influenced by her desire to work on the national archives of Somalia saying, "I do, I have a desire to visit Somalia, I do, especially the archives and Mogadishu because I worked at the U of M archives and I feel like the archives in Mogadishu needs a lot of help."

Not every participant shared this yearning for homeland. One of the participants who came to America in his teens was not particularly enamored with the notions of longing for homeland. Burhan, was cynical regarding the notions of return and yearning. He explained that the disconnect between the idealized characterizations as related by the older generation's reminiscing and the feelings that it is that same generation who is responsible for the current condition of Somalia, saying "without getting super political, and the short answer is no. No, I really because of the product of Somalia and what people in the older generation did is the result of why I'm here today." While his lack of emotional attachment was notable, it was also an exception to the rest of the participants who displayed varying degrees of yearning for homeland. Again, as previously noted, the rhetoric of return should not be seen as an end unto itself but as a means and a tool for identity construction.

Societal positionality and maintaining diasporic identity. The sociopolitical conditions of "mistreatment" and "exploitation" in the form of discrimination referred to as "mesosystems" in Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model (1993) also exert

influence on students' development. Somalis, as immigrant Black Muslims, have to contend with the layered marginalization that their existence entails in a society where anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-Black sentiments are prevalent. Their multiple marginalizations are exacerbated by the rise of politics of Islamophobia and xenophobia that were unleashed in the wake of candidacy and election of president Donald Trump. A number of participants noted that this climate of exclusion undermined their sense of citizenship and belonging. The feelings of alienation that resulted from stigmatization and discrimination placed them in a diasporic space that allows them to find alternative sources of belonging. Commenting on the relationship between ostracization on the part of the wider society and the construction of ethnic solidarity, one of the participants, Amin, observed:

> I think, well just coming here, coming to the country that was a pretty big time, being Somali, that's your identity, you know? Sometimes you may feel like you're just locked into that, you can't be anything else beyond Somali. Unfortunately, or maybe it is a good thing, you know, you want to keep your identity of being Somali, so it just depends on how you look at it at the end of the day.

In the above quote, Amin seems to be reframing the feelings of being discriminated against and putting it in a positive light since in the final analyses, it reinforced his sense of "Somaliness." His reactions to the negative stereotypes associated with Somalis were not limited to reframing his thoughts. It reinforced his sense of agency by actively engaging in biased depictions of his community. Explaining how the

association of Somalis with terrorism and piracy impacted his sense of self, he explained that the "recent issues of like terrorism all this stuff, and maybe Al-Shabaab, like a few years ago, 2010, 2009, that was a really big issue and then again Somali pirates, unfortunately you're being defined by this." He further explained how he would not let these stereotypes define his identity, stating "you just have to fight back and say, this doesn't define me, I'm more than this and despite my identity being Somali this isn't Somali."

The perception of not being enfranchised as a full citizen shaped participants' development of diasporic identity rooted in their parents' homeland. One participant, Iftin, explained how she resolved to embrace her Somali identity after recognizing that she will not be fully accepted as an American. She described how she asserted her Somali identity during the first day of week of college, saying, "when I was introducing myself in the first week of school it was like you know, hey just say your name, where you're from, dah, dah, dah, I was like, Hi, my name is Iftin, I'm from Somalia but I grew up here and like but my home is Somalia." She underlined how asserting that identity was central to her self-concept noting, "and I have to state that from the get-go because like I'm not going to claim here as my home." She went to further state her sense of belonging towards Somalia and the impact of exclusion and discrimination of her affinity to her ancestral homeland, saying "this is not my home and even though I've grown up here and I've never seen Somalia, it's still not my home and it never will be because we are not wanted here and I think when we realize that."

The next subsection discusses college campus as a site of diaspora identity construction. It analyses how college environment enhances Somali identity through peer influence and hostile contextual environments.

College and growing into diasporic identity. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) social-ecological model views the contextual environment of peer group as one of the most influential factors that influences the development of young adults. College context was instrumental in the development of diasporic identity development for the Somali students interviewed for this dissertation project. The increased amount of time they spent with their Somali peers and their inability to develop a sense of belonging within the religious and racial affinity based student organizations enhanced their diasporic Somali identity. The sites of these interactions were the office of the Somali Student Association (SSA) and at other events organized by SSA. Participants described both sites as influential in reinforcing their sense of Somali identity. These sites served as a source of solidarity among Somali students and give them sense of pride in their language.

Participants described the role of their Somali Student Association (SSA) in the construction of their Somali identity. They explained their peer relations were anchored in diasporic feelings of yearnings for their ancestral homeland. One of the participants, Amin, discussed the role of members of the Somali Student Association in the construction of his Somali identity. He explained his reluctance to assert his Somali identity when he was in high school and how his Somali peers created a space for him to embrace that identity, saying:

> I think it's been positive, for sure, you know I used to say I was like East Africa, Kenyan, I never used to claim outright Somali, especially like in middle school and high school, I used to say, I'm just African. But as growing up you start accepting your identity, like last year I was part of a Somali Student Association, which is a very good experience. You know, being part of these different organizations definitely enhances your Somali-ness and what it means to be Somali basically, especially coming to the U of M, there's a good number of Somali's here.

He further went on to state that the reason he chose to enroll in this university was because the size of the Somali student population, which solidified his Somali identity, saying "I see myself as Somali for sure." Another participant shared a similar sentiment in distinguishing how she felt about her identity as a Somali during her primary and secondary school years when she was going to predominantly White schools, and then later when she came to the university and established a sizable peer group made up of students of Somali descent. Illustrating her relationship between Somali peers she met at college and coming of age in terms of Somali identity, Aragsan said that she did not appreciate the significance of her identity before enrolling in college, saying "I came to the [university] of M my first year, I started hanging around a lot more Somali people and that just felt more natural, I just felt like, I wasn't forced to because for once in a very long time I felt really comfortable with all my identities." She went on to explain the impact that this had on the development of her identities, observing "so, over time I saw myself grow to really love my culture and my identity to the point to that I am now."

Emphasizing the role of the members of the Somali Student Association (SSA), a male participant, Barkhad stated that "when I came to university, many Somali students surrounded me….[and] that changed my whole perception of Somali students with Somali identity and how I should be proud of that." Other participants too, highlighted the sense of solidarity with which the Somali Student Association provided them and the impact it had on the development of their identity. Shamsa pointed out that she feels that Somali students are a "very close knit" community and that when she meets them "they say hi to [you] and smile at you because you know, just because there's a fellow Somali, so we kind of built this small community."

Participants pointed to this sense of community provided to them by the Somali Student Association (SSA). Warda, a female participant commented on how the association creates a "safe space" for them, noting that the "efforts of the SSA, you know always having these events where Somali students can network and meet people where we could just socialize" helps them integrate into school. Another participant shared that when she is not with other Somali students she is made to "feel ashamed" of her identity but feels the opposite when she is surrounded by other Somali students. Warda commented that "it is nice we have places like…. the Somali Student Association where like every day if I don't to SSA, I think I might lose my mind because I have to be around Somali people because no one else understands us like we understand us."

It was not solely the microsystems of the peer environment that shaped students' ethnic identity, but also macrosystems which include social and historical conditions of the students' ancestral homeland. The peer relationships were cemented through shared

diasporic feelings such as yearning for the homeland and a collective obligation to help that homeland recover from war effects. Iftin reasoned her desire and that of her Somali college friends is to obtain "education and then help our home because like this is not my home." While not all participants were as adamant about returning to Somalia as Iftin, they shared the desire to get involved in the improvement of their parents' homeland. Amin discussed how discussions with his friends about the sociopolitical crises in Somalia led them to found a political organization to help bring peace to their parents' homeland, "I really got involved in Somali politics I got into like rebuilding Somalia, created an organization called RSYL." He elaborated about the organization and its aims saying, "Revolutionary Somalia Young League [RSYL] and pretty much it branches off the Somali Youth League in general [SYL}." SYL was youth organization that led Somalia to independence from Italian and British colonialism (Putman & Noor, 1994). He further added "then it just added the concept of you know really starting this revolution with this younger generation."

Participants were involved in both political and charitable activities aimed at assisting Somalia. Amin described the efforts of a group of Somali college students to assist their counterparts in Somalia with scholarships and tutoring, saying, "we've already sent some scholarship money, so basically the SUBE project, it's called the Students United By Education project and pretty much what it does is we did an English Development course here at the University of Minnesota using the Moodle." Additionally, he shared that they are advocating opportunities for study abroad programs in Somalia, commenting:

> the other thing was really advocating for a study abroad program, right?....I said, you know why not have a study abroad program in Somali, right? Like why can't we do that? And so I started working with the Assistant Vice President Shakeer to really start working with us on that, he said there's going to be some uphill battle, some politics and stuff like that in terms of like security, right? But, I'm actually optimistic because once we start the advocacy program and finalize the proposal it's just a matter of really getting support, right?

The connections that participants have made between the contextual environment of college with the presence of a relatively large Somali student body infused with diasporic desires of ethnic solidarity rooted in an ancestral homeland illustrates the interaction between individual agencies and environmental factors in shaping ethnic identity. That interaction was not just the result of intragroup solidarities but also intergroup exclusions in the context of college. Participants explained that their tendency to gravitate towards spaces created by the Somali Student Association was because their needs for belonging could not be met through affiliations with other affinity organizations such as Muslim and Black student groups which were also available to them based on their multiple identities as Muslims and Blacks.

Participants described the assumptions that college administration make about Somali students and their need for on campus space. Sharing how the college leadership assumes that they will either affiliate with Muslim or Black student organizations and their need for their own space, one participant, Samira, noted that there is "assumption that Somalis would either to the [Muslim student organization] or go to [Black student

organization], but they don't [Somalis] just kind of make their own spaces." Commenting on how college administration needs to provide a space for Somali students, she said, "I think one thing they could do is give the Somali's on this campus in Coffman or something a space for themselves for like, because I mean it's different (*sic*)."

Another female participant, Ugbad, discussed the intersectionality of her identities, how that leaves her without a space to belong to on campus, and the role this had in growing in to her diasporic ethnic identity. Noting the impact of the intersections of her religious identity and racial identity erase each other in the context of finding an on-campus student group to belong to, she said "I'm very much aware that I'm dressed differently, my skin is dark but also that I am a Muslim." The emergence of strong ethnic identity among Somali college students is in part explained by the conundrum that intersectionality creates for Somali college students in finding a sense of belonging.

Diasporic identity played a dual function among Somali college students: It provided them with spaces populated by peers who were grappling with the same identity questions and it also afforded them an opportunity to assert their Somali identity, while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from their parents' conceptualizations of what it means to be Somali. Somalis are divided along clan lines complicated by religious sectarianism. The civil war that has been going in Somalia for decades has been fought along these social groups. Participants insisted on transcending the internal divisions with Somali community and were able imagine a community were such internecine sectarianism did not define. One participant, Asisa, shared her struggle of attempting to

stay to her roots but not be drawn into inter-clan violence involving blood feuds within the community, saying:

> I guess the first thing that comes to my mind is *qabiil* [clan in Somali] tribes, I don't really know much about them, I never really knew much about them and like I can understand wanting to like keep your connections as part of your identity because it's nice to know where you come from but at the same time I don't believe in the idea of like intertribal fights, you know? And like being enemies with other tribes just because some guy from long ago wronged some other guy in your tribe or like there's this land is ours and that cities is yours.

She went on to elucidate the generational dimension of her parents' notion of Somali identity rooted in their clan family which creates divisions within the Somali community and her version of Somali identity born out of diasporic characteristics marked by yearning for a peaceful Somalia. Noting how older generations are tied to the particularism of their clans and contrasting her experience, she said, "I just, so I'm thinking that somebody who lives in Somalia or an older person would have more connection with that because that's the thought process they grew up in or like that's just the values that you would hold over there."

As Asisa illustrates in the above quote, different generations within the Somali community create different understanding of what it means to be Somali. While parents who are first-generation immigrants share narratives of pre-civil war Somalia often cast in nostalgic terms, the meanings they attach to what it means to be Somali diverges. Participants such as Asisa noted that older generations understand being Somali in ways

that are attached to the particularisms of their clans and regions whereas second generation Somalis who are raised or born in this country are removed from these traditional ways of being Somali and are likely to imagine more universal identity that that transcends the particularisms of clan and regional identities. Describing these complexities involved in her attachment to her parents' homeland and experiential differences between her and her parents to that connection, Ruweda, noted "my parents always talk about it, my grandma always talks about it and I don't feel a disconnect but I also don't feel a complete connect, you know. Because it's just one of those things where you know, I have to like physically feel it or be there to actually feel the connection."

Racialized Islam

The salience of religious dimension of the Somali college student emerged from participants' description of Islam as central to what it means Somali and their parents' efforts in inculcating Islamic values in their children. Participants also discussed their experiences of growing up as Muslims in a society where Muslims are viewed with suspicion and are consequently made the objects of prejudice and discrimination. Analyses of the religious socialization that participants experienced in growing up in Muslim households, religious racialization as members of a faith stereotyped as a threat to the wellbeing of society, as well as the participants' own agencies in contesting what it means to be Muslim, reveal how religious identity intersects with other dimensions of Somali college students' identity such as gender, ethnicity and race.

Religious identity and family. Participants described how Islam is embedded in Somali culture and how it was intertwined into the fabric of their life. Amin, a male

interviewee notes that in his family to be Somali was to be a Muslim saying, "growing up, I think Muslim-ness is firmly embedded in Somali, especially in households, so maybe if you're growing up and you just kind of think, you know Muslim is just part of being Somali." Other participants noted that during their childhood their ethnic identity was overshadowed by their religious identity. A female participant, Aragsan, observed that Somali identity "wasn't necessarily, at least in my household, religion was more of a big deal and I'd go to like Dugsi [Islamic school]."

A number of participants noted the importance of religion among Somali immigrants. They pointed out that the religious schools that their parents sent them to as children were the first institutions the Somali community established upon their arrival in the United States. A female participant, Fartun observed:

> I think Somalis are very conservative and you can see that in just Minneapolis in general compared to other groups that are Muslim. I feel like we're, like the religiosity is there in the Somalian community, and you already see that too, like the structure like Masjids [Mosques] and Dugsis [Islamic Schools] and how Somalis when they first came here, the first thing they did and built Masjids, so you could already see how important religion is on our community.

Other participants explored their culture and its impact on their religious identity. They observed the connection between their heritage as overwhelmingly Muslim and their current minoritized status and how these dynamics are figured into the saliency of the religious dimension of their identity. Hodan noted that "Somalia I think the percentage of people who are Muslim are, like, 90 something percent. So, for sure being

religious is a very big aspect of being Somali. We've taken Islam as sort of a, as a part of our culture. So yeah, being religious is a very important aspect." A similar yet more nuanced sentiment was expressed by Salim, saying, "I think over 95% is Muslim, so I would firmly say being Muslim is the identity of a Somali person. But for me, I don't want to say that I'm Muslim because I'm Somali. I just want to say I'm Muslim because I'm Muslim, you know."

The influence of these overlapping environmental systems such as family, community, college, mass media, and governmental institutions and the responses they provoked from the Somali college students who participated in this study were evident in how they described the development of their religious identity. This was particularly true with female participants who, as part of their Islamic faith wear an Islamic garb that covers most of their body known as Hijab. Jamila, a female participant noted:

> To me I was raised in a very religious family, and as I got older I think is when I started to ask questions, I started to not bash but to also understand what I'm practicing, what I'm doing you know when my mom tells me to cover up, you know, I had to have the conversation with her and say, well why am I covering it up? You say before God but you make me feel like it's for you. So, questions like that, I remember my mom telling me a line like, you make me worry when you ask questions like that.

Jamila went to explain her intention was not to rebel against her mother's wishes but rather to seek understanding. Emphasizing how the efforts to grapple with her spirituality was critical to the formation of her religious identity, she explained "to me it

wasn't because I was challenging her but I wanted to believe this without my mom just drilling it down my head."

Religious identity and seeking personal agency. The transition from the perception of religion as an "ascribed identity" to that of a chosen identity in the context of the college experience was evident in how female participants negotiated and sometimes contested their religiously proscribed *hijab* in the context of their families. Samira, a female participant, discussed how her religious views have evolved since her childhood, her critique of Somali family norms, and aspects of Somali child-rearing practices that she would like to change. Sharing her disagreements with her parents' imposition of Islamic dress code on her during her childhood, she said "I didn't like being a kid, you know, it feels so normal, like you don't really think about things and you don't question it…. And also like just putting really big like hijabs on the little kids doesn't make any sense to me."

Somali students' tendency to contest and distinguish their understanding of spirituality from that of their parents is taking place in the context of their role as college students where the intellectual microsystem of academia requires them to develop habits of "critical thinking" and question the inherited wisdom of their families (Renn, 2003). Bashir, another student, discusses the challenges of maintaining his belief systems in an academic environment where students are expected to examine their taken-for-granted truths rooted in religious identities, noting:

> I'm going guess, sometimes like we go through confusion like who we are, so sometimes when it happens it's like when you're going to college and your trying

> to learn different subjects, some of those subjects might challenge you and some of them you may not agree for example if you're taking a philosophy class, and then if you kind of stick to your identity and say, I don't believe this but this is how I believe it….so that's what I'm saying and like sometimes you have to stick with who you are because that's what defines you whatever you and that's like I feel like people will respect you if you stick to who you are.

In both of Samira and Bashir's struggles, the impact of the conflicting demands of components within the microsystem, such as family and the college experience, on the salience of religious dimension of identity is evident. However, Samira's critique of her family's desire to regulate her dress code should not be seen as a binary conflict between her culture and that of mainstream society. Similarly, Bashir acknowledged that the college is a setting where an exposure to and learning about diverse ideas that result in "confusion" of previously held beliefs is inevitable, and yet still struggles to hold onto the principles of faith which he holds as not only a private religious matter but also a part of what defines him.

Religious racialization and religious identity. Participants discussed the role of societal and governmental perceptions about Islam in shaping the formation of their religious identity. Many of them described how Islam is perceived to be associated with terrorism and incompatible with modernity and how these depictions of Islam are used to justify discrimination and the violation of their basic civil rights. Warsame shared his experiences of discrimination based on religion, saying "I mean people are calling you a terrorist, people are you know all kind of stuff that people believe." He further noted the

role of the media in perpetuating Islam as synonym with terrorism, arguing that what "they see on the media which isn't always true. It's like literally probably ten thousand people who believe in these terrorism, all this stuff, a lot of them blame Muslims. You know media, you know, they always portray things wrong." Another participant, Waris, related how her sister was once threatened because she was identified as a Muslim, saying, "my sister was in the freeway once, she was driving from Rochester and she had a guy who was in, he was in the lane before her and next to her and he pulled out a weapon. He didn't shoot at her, thankfully, he just called her very negative comments."

In discussing their experiences with religious racialization and its attendant societal and institutional discrimination, a number of participants used the term Islamophobia. Interviews were conducted during the 2016 presidential campaign cycle and many participants talked about the intensified discrimination that they faced as the result of Donald Trump's candidacy and how this impacted their interracial friendships. This was described by Issa who said:

> what impacted me was ever since the election year started, with Trump's message towards hate towards Muslim's in general, for personally I feel like I've been attacked because or like most times getting attacked because of their faith….and for him to say that, to have this like negative like statement, for me I felt like I've been attacked and, and what's even worse was having those people that I grew up with in high school where, since Trump appears all of a sudden they started to support him and I realized that, like my god, racism and hate does exist after, in social media on how they have like this strong support of Trump and pretty much

> from what I've seen, like so and I was pretty surprised, like especially people who I considered them like who I considered as friends.

Participants also described the potential negative impact of the profiling practices engaged in by local law enforcement agencies on Somali youth. Bashir argued that the law enforcement agencies see "Somali[s] and anybody who's Muslim as a threat." He further elucidated the impact this additional law enforcement scrutiny had on the development of Somali youth, echoing the criticism against policing practices against racial minorities, he said:

> It makes them fear the government. I think it makes them more cautious of what they're doing but at the same time it makes us kind of rebellious because they don't want the system to control what they're going to do. You know, like if they want to go something that's bad, you can catch them but the means of catching them is what the issues is right now. It's what people are struggling with. They think the easiest way to catch someone is to monitor them at all times, to prevent the treat you must, you know, go through anybody who might seem like a threat which are Somali's at the moment, you know?

Other participants described the impact that the perceived prejudice of law enforcement agencies had on their self-conception. They discussed that how they organized themselves as college students to fight the government sponsored stigmatization. One of these participants, Osman, explained that he is part of a group of young Somalis who formed a "Somali collective" in order to push back against the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), a federal counter-terrorism program. Stating the

objective of the group, he said that they want to “Push our narrative out there instead of the narrative that they’re trying to push on to us.”

The findings from the analysis of the data suggest the salience of religious identity was borne out of the need to represent themselves in a positive way. Shamsa described how her circumstances forced her to represent and advocate for her community and how this impacted the formation of the religious dimension of her identity. She explained that in a college setting, such as a classroom, “you’re the only, sometimes one of like less than one percent Muslim in the classroom and so you learn to represent yourself and your culture and your religion in the best way instead of being ashamed of it.” She went on to say that, over time, she came to realize that “fitting in isn’t always the best thing so be proud to be different at least and you have all this culture and this diversity and this religion and it just comes with a lot, like a lot more on your plate in a good way.”

As discussed previously, Islam specifies a Muslim dress-code for females only. This means male Muslims can often seamlessly blend into the general non-Muslim population without drawing attention to themselves. The resulting intersectionality will be discussed later in the gender identity dimension section.

Campus environment and consolidating religious identity. College experiences consolidated participants’ Muslim identity in two ways: it provided them with a space for group prayers and exposed them to ideas that posed challenges to their notions of faith and made them conscious about their faith and the tenants thereof. Participants described the prayer rooms, where Muslim students gathered to perform the

ritualistic five daily prayers, as something they did not have in high schools. Aragsan noted that these organized prayers gave her "more sense of who you are, it teaches you more about yourself than you'd be able to explore in high school." She further added that these prayer rooms in college helped her "become more in touch spiritually because" she "can connect with God anytime."

Participants discussed what these organized prayers meant to them and how it reinforced their religious identity. Bashir noted that these prayers provided him with structure that helped him cope with the demands of college. Commenting on how the religious structure impacts his religious identity, he said "being a practicing Muslim person is what makes me….happy and always makes me easier to go through if I'm going through a challenge." He further emphasized that practicing the teachings of Islam "is what makes me the person I am today."

The academic environment exposed participants to ideas and philosophies that challenged their faith. Ubah shared how difficult it is to practice a faith in a college environment where religion is questioned. Commenting on this, she noted that "being a college student and following your religion is kind of hard because I'm in an environment where people, many people have open minded ideas" about religion. She added that college students, on the whole, are antagonistic towards religion, saying that most college students are "atheist or agnostic or they don't, they don't believe in God." Other participants noted that this environment put pressure on them to "fit in." Jamila noted that "there is lot of pressure to do a lot of things, there's a lot of pressure to fit in because you don't want to stand out." The resistance to assimilative pressures had the effect of

students negotiating ways to embrace their faith while participating in college experiences. Jamila added that "it was hard to find a medium" between remaining faithful and enjoying the college experience.

In summary, the saliency of the religious dimension of the Somali students who participated in this dissertation project was impacted by contextual factors such as family, college, mass media, societal attitudes, and governmental policies as well as participants' own "developmentally instigative characteristics" reflected in their personal agencies to respond to these contextual forces (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Findings from the data suggest that religious identity cannot be examined in isolation from other aspects of identity such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Analyses on how contextual environments, particularly campus environments, give rise to this intersectionality and its implications for the emergent diaspora as the most potent identity dimension among the participants in this dissertation project will be discussed in foregoing sections on gender, racial, and ethnic identity dimensions.

Gendered Norms

To the students who participated in this dissertation research, gender was found to be most salient among females who were raised in families where patriarchy informed child-rearing practices and gender roles were common.

The confluence of patriarchy at home and Islamophobia outside the home makes the gender dimension particularly salient. The intersections of these identities were taking place "within a complex, dynamic, interactive web" of contextual settings such as microsystems of family and religious institutions, as well exosystem components of

society and mass media (Renn, 2003). Participants discussed how school norms, family patterns of gender role attitudes, and gendered freedoms and restrictions as well as their individual agencies interacted in shaping the formation of their gender identity.

Family and emerging gender identity. Both female and male participants discussed that Somali families traditionally place their sons in a privileged status in comparison to their daughters. They attributed this privilege to patriarchy and gender norms prescribed in the Islamic faith which overwhelmingly Somalis follow. This privileged status manifested itself in several ways. It was reflected in gendered house chores and gendered individual liberties in matters relating to curfew times, extracurricular activities, dating, and marriage.

Participants across both genders stated that, on the whole, Somali boys occupied a more privileged status than Somali girls within the context of their families. Aragsan reflected on his privileged male identity and how that privilege decreased its salience saying:

> I'm not sure to be honest. I never really thought about it but I could say, unfortunately being a Somali male, I'm given certain privileges that would probably not be given to a Somali woman or something. For instance, I may have more freedom, you know, such as according to my parents.

Female participants were, however, more likely to be conscious about the system of gendered privileges at play in Somali families. A female participant, Suban, argued that Somali families value their sons over their daughters, saying "I feel like sometimes Somali boys are babied too much."

Most participants, both female and male, attributed the different standards held for different genders, as well as the levels of control and freedom afforded to them, to patriarchal traditions rooted in Somali culture and Islam. A male participant, Abadir, remarked on the prevalence of patriarchy in Somali culture and alluded that Somalis historically might not have been conscious about these cultural practices, saying "there's a lot of patriarchy, I can't deny there's like there's patriarchy you know, there's a lot of like misogyny that, we might not even know exists because these aren't issues that we face in our country [Somalia]." Fahmo, a female participant, explained the reasons Somali parents place a premium on the girls is that the honor of the family among the community depends on how their daughters conduct themselves in public, emphasizing that "the female it's like, it's like they're the face of the family." She related how she tried to enroll in a study abroad program and her father objected to her travelling by herself by invoking gendered traditional notions that dictates what is appropriate for a woman. Quoting from the words of her father in Somali and completing the incident in English she described the back and forth dialog between her and her father, saying "my dad has said this a lot it's like we hear about it a lot because I'm trying to study abroad and he's like [Speaking in Somali: *Gabdhaha waxaas ma aha, xaafadda joog, waxaa tahay sharafta….*][meaning, a girl is not supposed to do that, stay at home, you carry the honor of the family….]." Fahmo told how this gendered norms would not apply to Somali males, commenting that "If I was a guy I could have done all of that, I could have done it and he's like [Speaking in Somali: *Wiilasha waa waxba….*][meaning, it is not a

problem if a boy does]…..It's not as bad if you're a guy because [Speaking in Somali: *Gabdhahaa ka xun*….][meaning, it is much worse if a girl does it….]."

The above exchange illustrates how gender dynamics in Somali families contribute to the gender identity among Somali female students. In the above exchange, the father relies on Somali traditions of patriarchy where notions of feminine chastity and modesty determine a family's honor and respectability. It is noteworthy that the father clearly outlines the gender-based double standards in his explanation that the same conduct would not threaten family's honor if it were done by a son. A related concept of how Somali families justified the gendered restrictions of their children was raised by another female participant. Hodan discussed the gendered consequences of socializing and dating, saying "some of them date, and it happens right, but if it gets caught by the parents, the girl would be ashamed, and like, humiliated, and just every blame would, most of the blame would be put on her." She added that males are unlikely to be punished as they are held to different standards, whereas the shameless girls who are labeled as promiscuous will have their reputation ruined, saying "nobody would want to marry you, you're tarnished."

The gendered privileges that Somali parents provide to their children and the resulting salience of female gender identity was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews. While females, as the forgoing quotes illustrate, had high level of awareness of the impact of these gendered restrictions on their lives, male participants were less cognizant of these dynamics. Ugbad, a male participant, observed that Somali parents "definitely give guys more leeway" whereas the same lifestyle choices would "bring

shame on their entire family if it were engaged [in] by a girl." He further remarked that Somali parents would justify their gendered perception by dismissing boy's conduct as "just being a guy, guys will be guys or whatever."

Gendered house chores. The construction of female identity in Somali households was most stark in its enforcement of the patriarchal and gendered division of labor. It should be noted that out of the 41 participants interviewed for this dissertation project, only three were not living with their families and all these were males. Girls were more likely to perform house chores exclusively, which was the case even in the instances were both boys and girls were employed and going to college. Amin, a male participant, discussed the gender specific roles with the Somali household saying "We also expect them to be in the house like you know at least cooking and cleaning, in general, girls." Another female participant noted the privileged status of Somali boys when it comes to house chores when she was talking about how her aunt treats her son saying:

> My aunt babies her son, he's 26 years old and she still does his laundry, and I'm like, you're setting him up for failure, just because he's too, I don't know, like my aunt got so mad because my cousin went to the kitchen, and he's a boy, and I'm like, like why, I'm in the kitchen, like, are you making it seem like he's too good to be in the kitchen?

Another female participant, Samira, made a similar observation about the different expectations of who does what at home. She described how when their male Somali counterparts enroll in college, "all they have to focus [on] is going to college,

whereas as a Somali girl I have to focus like I never stop cleaning, I never stop cooking for my siblings, I never stop like being like all those expectations that are at home, I never have to stop."

As discussed previously, the salience of female gender identity was linked to the unequal gender relations at home. The inequality of freedoms afforded to different genders, the disproportionate burden of domestic work placed on females, and their perceived relative strength in educational outcomes in the context of the wider society's gender dynamics motivated Somali females to challenge the patriarchy normed gender inequality. The connection participants made about gendered restrictions and gendered educational outcomes on one hand, and the agency it engendered among female participants to contest the existing gender relations in their families will be discussed in the following section.

Gendered identity and educational outcomes. Among participants, there was near unanimous perception that, on the whole, Somali females are outpacing their male counterparts in terms of educational achievement. This was discussed in the context of responses to the question, "what does it mean to be Somali female/male college student." Participants attributed much of the variance in educational outcomes along gender lines to their parents' hands-on approach in regulating the social lives of their daughters and their hands-off approach when it comes to their involvement in the lives of their sons. Parents' gendered approach to the involvement in the lives of their children was largely attributed to patriarchal traditions in Somali community that ties notions of family honor

and communal standing to the sexuality and lifestyle choices of their daughters and not to that of their sons.

Both male and female participants believed that the Somali family environments that favors boys had deleterious effect on boys' self-efficacy and self-sufficiency, particularly as it related to educational outcomes. They reasoned that boys' privileged status at home leaves them unprepared to succeed in life outside the home. A male participant, Abadir, noted "Somali males, I think we're a little spoon fed compared to the girls because I feel like the girls at an earlier age it's kind of a custom and tradition for mothers to make them clean and do things" and that Somali family have a "custom of making [girls] act like grownups at a young age" and "that's what sets them up to succeed." Khadija, a female participant attributed the early responsibilities that Somali girls assume in their gendered household roles prepares them for the challenges of life in college saying:

> I feel like a lot of studies have shown that women mature earlier than men and I feel like Somali's household, well most of them or personally my experience the boys are not used to taking care of themselves. So, while the women are used to taking care of everybody in the house, so I feel like coming to college for women is not that hard because you're already, you're just multitasking more than you were used to.

Another female participant made a connection between the extra responsibilities family places on girls and how this helps them develop life skills that could then be parlayed into educational success. This participant, Jamila, shared her experience of

meeting multiple family expectations that did not apply to her brothers, saying that compared to Somali girls, “Somali boys do not have as much responsibilities.” Her family expected her to perform multiple tasks of cooking and cleaning whereas her brother “was just going to school and nothing, nobody was asking anything of him.” She observed that the same dynamics of expectations were at work when it comes to educational achievements, stating “it’s the reality of like why there’s not much Somali boys in college is because they’re not getting the same pressures as the Somali females.”

The patriarchy-based gender roles were not the only factor associated with the salience of gender identity. Gendered parenting, as it relates to what school related activities students are allowed over the course of their education, was also associated with Somali girls’ better educational outcomes and their subsequent stronger position in negotiating and contesting familial and cultural patriarchy.

Female participants were more cognizant of their families’ gender-based restrictions relating to what their parents would allow them to do outside the house and how this has affected the trajectory of their educational journeys. A female participant, Hodan, said “honestly, the only reason, the only way I could go out is if I was at school, or at work, or studying, being with my friends, ok ok, I could do that once in a while, but if I do that every day, like some of these Somali boys do, it’s not ok.” Other participants shared similar stories of the differences in what was permissible in a school setting from the standpoint of their families. Warda, a female participant, gave an example of the activities her parents would permit her to engage in and what was not encouraged, saying, “if I said something like, you know, oh I’m going to someone’s birthday dinner or

something, my parents would like try to discourage me, like you know, there's better things you could do but if I was to say something like, oh, I'm going to spend my Saturday at the library they would be like, yes, go do that."

Both female and male participants connected the gendered regulation of students' leisure and school-related activities to Somali girls' perceived educational outcomes. They noted that the relatively stricter controls that parents place on their daughters had the result of ensuring that girls were more likely to focus on their education whereas boys were distracted by activities that were not instrumental in the advancement of their education. The lax controls, they reasoned, made boys less serious about their education and ultimately resulted in gendered educational outcomes in favor of females. A female participant, Basra, discussed how Somali females are educationally outpacing Somali males despite the sexism they encounter in their household and in the wider society, saying:

> In Somalia, of course, we encounter a lot of sexism and misogyny but of course that's also the same in this country but at the university and I've heard this vocalized by another Somali women, if you come here you will definitely see the, to a university setting you will see that Somali women kind of out number Somali men and this is almost true of like any kind of setting, the people who are in the Somali community who are going out getting education and so on and so forth are typically women, I feel like this is because more onus is placed upon the women in terms of like honor, kind of thing. For example, girls are kind of restricted about what times they can go out at night, who they can hang out with, what are

> they doing all the time and whereas the Somali boys they don't face that as much. So, I think that contributes to a kind of delinquency in Somali men.

Another female participant, Iftin, explained that Somali females are motivated to focus on their education because it empowers them to be independent of the gender relations that otherwise disadvantages them. Discussing the empowerment aspect of attaining higher education, she observed that for females, college education is their "escape route" from patriarchy. I asked her to elaborate on the metaphor of education "escape route" and she continued:

> Ya, oh just like in general just like, you know some women, even if they were unhappy, even if they wanted a divorce, they could, they didn't feel like they could because like, who's going to take care of my kids away?

She related how her mother advised her to be independent and "never to depend on anyone else but yourself." She reasoned that the motivation to be independent of male patriarchy motivates Somali females to pursue education.

A number of participants believed that Somali female college students had better educational outcomes than male Somali college students. In the early stages of the interviews, it was noted that the general question on gender phrased along the lines of "what does it mean to be a Somali college student" immediately elicited responses that observed how the females were overrepresented in the Somali college population. When asked a follow up questions on what explained this disproportionate representation, most participants explained it as a consequence of gendered controls and gendered school related activities. In fact, one female participant, Hodan, summarized the connection

between gendered parental controls and the corresponding gendered educational outcomes in favor of females as, “if Somali girls are all being restricted to staying home at a certain time, we’re probably going to read our books, you know.”

Negotiating and contesting gender identity. Female participants, in turn, used their perceived better educational outcomes to negotiate and contest the construction of Somali femininity and womanhood on patriarchal ideas such as gender roles and sexual modest. Participants displayed awareness of the generational differences between their self-conception and their parents’ attitudes towards them, and the environmental influences that shaped the gender attitudes of each generation.

The girls’ relative strength in the academic context of the college interacted with the family context in ways that impacted the identity development of students, particularly female students. Their stronger educational outcomes, compared to males, helped female Somali college students find agency to renegotiate their status in the family vis-à-vis male students. In Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological, the interaction between contextual microsystems such as family and school that affect the development of students is called mesosystem. The mesosystem contextual influences not only contributed to the salience of female participants’ gender identity but also empowered them to develop agency necessary in challenging the unequal gender relations both at home and in the society.

Describing the emotional impact of gendered household chores on Somali girls, a female participant, Warda, pointed out that “it makes them more like bitter towards things.” Another participant, Samira, noted a generational divide between the women

socialized in the culture in Somalia who attempt to enact similar gendered patterns in their lives here in America and those who were raised in America. She described how, as a younger girl, she just followed what her parents told her to do but as her maturational and developmental faculties advanced, she started to question the prevailing gender arrangement, stating "when you're younger you don't necessarily question things, you just kind of go with it." Observing how she started to assert her opinion, she noted that "at some point you do start to think about the way things are so when I did want to hang out with my friends like they'd be telling me about the things that they did and I would be thinking to myself why can't I go and hang out with them?"

Another female student, Hodan, related the ongoing negotiations she engages in with her mother in her effort to contest the gendered norms that she feels maintain the patriarchal hierarchy. She was forceful in how she felt about this tradition in her community saying, "that's the society that we're living in and it's such trash, and I don't know, hopefully it changes." She further described her mother's reaction to her work on gender equality, saying "my mom will get so mad because she hates when I talk like this, she's like (Speaking Somali, [*Hooyo*] meaning, [my daughter]), you don't know anything, and I'm like, I really don't because, just pissing me off." Explaining how her gender role views contrasted with that of her mother, she described how she would express her views, telling her "(Speaking Somali, [*Hooyo*] meaning, [mom]), when I get married, you're going to come home and you're going to see my husband cooking , and she got so mad, she's like, I would never eat that, that's not a man."

The interactive processes of gendered norms at home and higher educational outcomes elicited what Bronfenbrenner calls "instigative developmental responses" in his socio-ecological model (1993, p. 11). These responses influenced the saliency of female participants' gender identity by allowing them to contest the unequal gender dynamics and negotiate for more equitable gender norms. A female participant, Khadija, discussed how women are not represented in the Somali community at leadership levels and the pride she takes in the emerging female leadership in Somali community, saying "women are always erased from where meetings are happening and things, and I'm very happy that Ilhan Omar [the newly elected Minnesota State Representative who is the first Somali to serve as a state legislator in the United States] is going up there." To her State Representative Omar symbolized a new generation of Somali females who challenged and prevailed over the existing gender norms in the community. She went on to describe how institutions of Somali community are male dominated and used the mosque she belonged to illustrate the gender power dynamics that favored males over females, stating "I grew up in Abubakar Sadiq [Islamic Center – Somali mosque, Minneapolis, MN], and that's how the Abubakar Sadiq board is and how things worked in *masjid* [mosque] women weren't really allowed to be board members or make important decisions and things like that, even though women were the majority of the people who were at the *masjid* [mosque] all the time."

Khadija further discussed her mother's gendered experiences with the male leadership at the mosque, how her own experiences in school shaped her agency, and

how that sense of agency helped her challenge exclusion of women in Somali community organizations and institutions, noting:

> I ended up starting a youth, kind of board, kind of for the *masjid* [mosque] that I was a part of with a couple of friends and a majority of us, that was the last year we came back to the *masjid* [mosque] because we would try to organize all these events and things, we were all a group of kids who had positions in our high school, you know, we were part of the student council, we were part of MSA's [Muslim Student Association] as BSU [Black Student Union] students, different things, so we knew what it felt like to organize things and hold events and to make money and to kind of facilitate an event using the money that we collected and every single time when we would try to do something that would get blocked, and I know everyone on that board never came back to the *masjid* [mosque] after that, which is very sad.

Discussion of the intergenerational fissures concerning what it means to be a Somali woman was repeated by several participants. As with Khadija, they were cognizant of the interactive nature the web of contextual environments their life entailed, navigating and negotiating their own developmental processes and how these were impacting the saliences of their multiple identities. The salience of gender identity among female participants was attributed to the patriarchy at home and Islamophobia in the public. The extra attention and scrutiny of parents over the activities of their daughters had the unintended effect of producing educational disparity in favor of females. Female participants, in turn, used their relative strength in educational outcomes

to confront patriarchal gender norms and demand gender equality in both household chores and individual freedoms, contributing to the salience of gender identity among the female participants in the context of the family. Additionally, acts of Islamophobia that females face based on their distinct Islamic dress of hijab further cemented the salience of their gender identity and religious identity.

Conclusion

This dissertation project explores the influence of multiple environments of family, society and postsecondary climate of college on multiple identities of Somali students. The project was framed by Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model and Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI). MMDI expounds that individuals embody multiple identities and the salience of each identity dimension is influenced its relative privileged or oppressed status in familial, societal and institutional contexts (Jones & McEwen, 2003). Four major themes of identity dimensions impacted by the intersections of these dimensions and influenced and filtered through three contextual environments emerged from the findings. The emergent identity dimensions were racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms.

The first theme to emerge was racialized experiences as Blacks. Salient racial identity of "becoming Black" was borne out racialization that participants experienced as Blacks who have negotiated their racial identity from position of marginality (Asante et al., 2016). Blackness was particularly associated with the concepts of citizenship and equal rights and was articulated in ways that expressed racial solidarity and identified with the everyday experiences of African Americans. The strategy of deploying their

Blackness allowed participants to counter experiences in ways that fit into the long arch of the history of the struggle of racial equality. Conversely, participants were cognizant how perceptions of the "foreignness" of their Somali and Muslim affinities made them strategically less viable when it comes to demands for civil rights and equality. The salience of participants' Black identity was particularly impacted by politics of race within the multiracial and multiethnic Muslims students in college. Participants found that in the context of the Muslim student groups on campus, Islam was often equated with being Middle Eastern and as the result, they recognized that their salient Black identity was on collision course with their religious identity. In the context of the student organizations where Islam was racialized as Brown and being Black Muslim was seen as oxymoron, these intersections of racial and religious identity had the practical effect of contributing further salience of participants' racial identity as Blacks.

The second theme was diasporic ethnic identity given rise by diasporic attachments. While participants associated the racial identity as Blacks with notions citizenship and equal rights, the ethnic identity as members of diaspora community was constructed around a need for belonging satisfied by emotional attachment to their ancestral homeland. A collective feeling of a sense of belonging to an imagined community projected unto an idealized homeland which should be restored and returned defined participants' diasporic identity. Diasporic identity was flexible as it relied on the imagination of its members and was in part necessitated by the consequences of their intersecting multiple identities of race and religion. While being Blacks was politically empowering, the settings of non-Muslim Black student organizations could meet their

need for belonging as Muslims. Conversely, Muslim student organizations were seen as Brown spaces that were unwelcoming to Blacks. The search for an authentic space to belong led participants to gravitate around other Somali students, further cementing their identity as members of diaspora community whose sense of belongings and loyalties are anchored in an imagined community that transcends their geographical confines.

In addition to race and ethnicity, religion and gender emerged from the data as salient themes. The salience of religious identity was influenced by the religiosity of immigrant families and the status of Muslims as stigmatized social group viewed with suspicion by the public and singled out for scrutiny by law enforcement agencies under the pretext of preventing terrorism. The influence of families on the religious identity of Somali college students was reflective of the values their parents instilled in them during their childhood. However, during participants' college years, their description of their religious identity became more of a political identity as opposed to a practiced faith. In the campus context, they asserted their religious identity as they assumed the role of defending Islam from the misconceptions that society holds against their religion.

Gendered norms were the final theme that emerged from the findings. Gender norms were influenced by the divergent views that Somali families had regarding the meaning and construction of womanhood, the perceptions and attitudes that general public held about Muslims, and the participants' own views on Somali women and their experiences. Somali gender norms and roles are rooted in a patriarchy strongly influenced by Islam and tradition (Kapteijns, 1999). In the context of participants' families, the patriarchy manifested in gendered house chores and gendered behavioral regulations.

Female identity was tied to performing household tasks and closer parental scrutiny on girls' social life and sexuality and enforcement of notions of gendered modesty. This closer involvement of girls social and educational experiences on the part of parents resulted in gendered educational outcomes where females outperformed males. Unequal gendered household workload contributed to the salience of female gender identity while comparatively stronger educational achievements empowered them to challenge the patriarchy based gender inequality. Additionally, female participants had to contend with the challenges of being publicly identifiable Muslims due to their distinct Islamic dress, known as hijab. The hostile contextual environments coupled with their emerging their "declared identity" as Muslims gave rise to further salience of gender identity.

In all four emergent themes of racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms were marked generational differences of what it means to be Muslim, female, Black, and Somali. While first generation immigrant parents were more likely to be religious in ways that emphasized the orthodoxy of faith, second generation Somali college students were likely to understand Islam as the identity of who they are as opposed to what they do in their practice of faith. Participants were also likely to subvert the notions of patriarchy in which their parents were steeped. The need to challenge gendered norms were expressed by both females and males although females were more vehement in their determination to question and ultimately undermine their parents' tendency for patriarchy. The differences in generational views was also evident in the construction of racial identity. Parents were not only less likely to embrace their identity as Blacks but also saw it as a threat to their identity as Somalis. In contrast

to this, participants saw that their American experience was defined by racial inequality and saw their struggle for racial equality as an extension of the wider civil rights movement. Finally, the participants attempted to distinguish what their Somali ethnic identity forged from diasporic identity, meant to them, and what it signified for their parents. They were reluctant to embrace the clan identifications that tend to threaten the unity of their community and were more likely to cast their Somali identity diasporic terms infused with abstractive affinity and emotional attachment to an imagined homeland of their parents.

In summary, salient identities of racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms of participants were influenced by familial, societal, and institutional environments as well as the amplifying and sometimes negative effect of the intersections of these multiple identities embodied in multiple contextual marginalizations overlaid with generational differences. As participants shared, generational views were not always static or consistent but dynamic and unpredictable. Most importantly, it is imperative to underline that participants were college students and therefore were reflecting their experiences as Somali college students who were born or raised in the US. That said, the generational lens in examining the identity development of Somali college students within the multiple environments in which their lives are embedded was vital in interrogating the processes that shaped the salience of their racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation project was to explore how Somali students work out questions relating to their multiple identities in the context of the multiple environmental domains in which their lives are embedded. The imperative for research that contributes to the knowledge on college student development is underscored by the gap in the literature on this understudied but growing student population (Citizens League, 2007; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Kim & Diaz, 2013). Additionally, Somali college students have been facing increasingly hostile campus environments due to the intersections of their multiple marginalities as Black Muslim immigrants in a time when these identities are being singled out for discrimination, prejudice, and scrutiny (Chambers, 2017; McGuire et al., 2016; Shamas, 2009; Sides et al., 2017).

The dissertation project was framed by two integrated models to inform the examination of the identity development of Somali students. The models include the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) and Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model. MMDI explains how the salience of particular dimensions of social identities such as race, gender, religion, culture, sexual orientation, and class are influenced by contextual factors of family dynamics, social and cultural conditions, and career choices (Jones & Abes, 2013). The socio-ecological model places "the development of individual students within a complex, dynamic, interactive web of environments, some of which do not even contain them, and provides a rich contextual field for the study of" the formation of college students identity (Renn, 2003, p. 386). The consideration of multiple and interactive social contexts and historical conditions is

particularly important to immigrant students like Somalis because as, Umana-Taylor et al. (2014) argue, immigration history and experiences are key developmental factors that impact the formation of identity. But while the integrated MMDI and socio-ecological models provide a nuanced understanding of how contextual environments can oppress or privilege identities and affect their salience in the process, it does not illuminate the meanings that individuals draw from these identities or the impact that the intersections of these identities have on each other.

This qualitative dissertation employed grounded theory methodology to allow themes and theory to emerge from the inductive data (Charmaz, 2014). Findings from 41 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with Somali college students suggest the salience of four identity dimensions of racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms. These dimensions were shaped by contextual influences of family, society, and campus dynamics. The dimensions were further amplified or erased by the intersections of these identities. The findings pointed to the divergent generational trajectories with respect to the saliences and meanings associated with the identities of the second-generation immigrant Somali college students and their first-generation parents.

This chapter discusses the data by relating the research questions to the salient themes from the findings. The first section addresses how Somali college students perceive their racial and ethnic identities, and what experiences and factors influence the formation and development of their identities, while the second section discusses how Somali college students attach meanings to their college experiences. The third section

discusses implications for research and practice, while the final section discusses a potential theory for thinking about Somali college students' experiences. This chapter will interpret the findings in relation to the existing literature on diverse college student identity development. The chapter will also explore implications for higher education practice and research. Finally, a reflection on the research process will be included.

Research Questions

Somali college students' perceptions about their racial identity and the contextual factors that influence it. The original research questions included two separate questions on how Somali college students perceived their racial and ethnic identity and the factors influencing the formation of their identity. However, teasing out individual perception from contextual factors proved untenable as participants framed their perception of racial identity in terms of the multiple contexts in which their lives were embedded. For this this reason, the two questions will be addressed in terms of the contextual factors that influenced participants' perception of their racial identity.

Participants attributed the development of their sense of racial identity to their experiences with racism, the impact of the intersections between their racial identity and the other dimensions of their identity, as well as the generational dimension of their experiences as second generation Somalis. Their understanding of racial identity was intertwined with their experiences of racism. The responses to the interview question of "what do you think about race" did not elicit detailed and rich responses beyond a basic acknowledgement of race as a fact of life in the United States. In contrast, the follow-up question of "when, if at all, did you first notice this" resulted in longer responses. This is

so because participants understanding of their racial identity was borne out of personal experiences of racism and their education on race relations. Participants often described how these components of experience and education shaped the formation of their racial identity. Fardawso, for example, started her response with "I didn't know as much as I know now, I mean you experience these events but you don't notice until you learn about it." The personal experiences with racism and the formal education on the role of race in America had the effect of solidifying their racial identity. Participants noted the contextual factors of racism including society and governmental institutions, such as law enforcement agencies, as influential in their perception and development of their racial identity. The exposure to random acts of racism was mentioned by several participants. Fardawso described these everyday acts of racism that included someone calling her "the N word" in public as critical in understanding her racial identity. Other participants mentioned their interaction with law enforcement agencies as a factor contributing to the development of their racial identity.

The intersections of participants' multiple identities in the context of college was particularly impactful in terms of their contribution to the salience and development of participants' racial identity development. Several participants noted the intersectionality of race and religion, and feelings of erasure of Black experiences in Muslim student groups as an influential factor in the formation of their racial identity. Participants like Samira cited experiences of "racial tension" within the multiracial Muslim student club as one of the factors that impacted her perception of race.

The United States is a society where racialized experiences and racism serve as the foundation for social order (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995). It is for this reason that Somali immigrants who arrive in the United States with established ethnic, religious, and national identities, as Bigelow argues, "over time, they develop a *racial* identity in countries" (2010, p. 101). Some studies suggested that Somalis who immigrated to the Western world following the civil-war in Somalia in 1991 tend to foreground their religious identity relative to their racial identity, though most of these studies focused on first generation Somali immigrants in cities such as Minneapolis, London, and Toronto (Abdi, 2007; Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; McGown, 1999). The subjects of these studies were first-generation immigrants who, due to the dislocation and the "theologizing experience" of immigration, tend to display a salient religious identity (Smith, 1978).

Educational institutions have long served as "central sites of racialization" for first and second generation students (Lee et al., 2016, p. 492). The racializing feature is particularly relevant to high school and college students who, as young adults, are grappling with questions relating to their sense of who they are and their place in society (Erikson, 1963; Tatum, 1997). Higher education has a long history of systemic racism (Patton, 2016; Wilder, 2013) but social movements such as the online based #BlackLivesMatter have brought attention to the endemic racism in higher education (Goode & Nicolazzo, 2016).

The hostilities Somali students face on campus is further exacerbated by the rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia resulting from an increasingly anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant political environment (Cherkaoui, 2016). Participants shared that one of the

few places that they felt safe on campus is a Muslim Cultural Center. However, the intersections of their racial identity as Blacks and their Muslim identity produced a situation where Somali students felt alienated, as the Muslim space is equated with a "Brown" space for Muslim students who are predominantly of Middle Eastern and South East Asian students. As discussed in the section on "Religion and Identity," in the wake of the "War on Terror," Islam came to be ascribed with labels laden with racial meanings. Gotanda argues that the "religious identity of Muslim overlaps with the racial category of Muslims" and that racial category is "associated with brown bodies" (2011, p. 188). Gotanda traces the equation of Islam with Brown Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian bodies and the resulting erasure of the existence of Black Muslims originating from Sub-Saharan Africa to the early European Orientalists, noting that "the link to the brown body comes through traditional Orientalism centered on the Arab world as well as the origins of most American immigrants who follow the Islamic faith. The focus on the brown body is heightened by manner of dress and specific cultural symbols such as the turban and hijab" (2011, p. 188).

The de facto effect of equating Islam with Middle Eastern and South Asian "Brown" communities was the alienation of Somali students who felt unwelcome in that space as Black Muslims. This made Brown the default racial identity of Muslim students who are attracted to the Center as a safe space in an otherwise unsafe campus and at the same time further "otherized" Black Muslims.

The literature on student development emphasizes the racialization processes ascribed to Black immigrant groups but hardly examines how immigrants respond to

these imposed racialized experiences. As Benson argues that while research suggests that Black immigrants "develop a shared racial group identity with native-born blacks over time, the meaning they attach to being black in America varies by native origin" (2006, p. 238). However, she observes, literature that investigates the racial identity formation of Black immigrants does not consider how the process of racialization varies per country of ancestry (2006). A number of researchers have emphasized the fluidity of race and racial identities. These researchers note that racial identities are not static but rather are socially constructed conceptualizations that emerge from dynamic interaction between the person and the environment (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1994). The formulation of racial identity development is forged through "not only circumstances but active responses to circumstances by individuals and groups" (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p. 77). This resembles Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model that depicts the human development process as the emerging of individual characteristics that "that induce or inhibit dynamic dispositions toward the immediate environment" that he termed as "developmentally instigative characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1993, p. 11).

The process of "becoming Black" that the Somali college students interviewed for this dissertation project actively engaged in was not unlike how some White ethnic groups (Irish, Italians, and Jews) became "White." While White ethnic groups redefined themselves as White to separate themselves from the Black working class, Somali immigrants are redefining themselves as Blacks to shed the perception of "foreignness" and ground their struggle within the broader history of the civil rights movement. While the historical process of "becoming White" was about joining the existing social order

and more privileged social ranks (Ignatiev, 2009), the contemporary African immigrants' experience of "becoming Black" is borne out of the inescapable racializing experiences of discrimination and bigotry. The desire to be enfranchised as Blacks while expressing solidarity with the oppressed African Americans allows them to tie their struggle for equality to the narratives of the civil rights movements. The awareness of themselves as political subjectivities was not shared by the first and second generation. The former was more likely downplay the experiences of racialization and hence the need for grounding their identities in broader Black racial experiences.

Researchers have noted the potency of popular culture in young Somali immigrants' propensity to position themselves as Blacks. In a study on the racialization of Somali youth, Bigelow (2010) observes that the Somali youngsters in the research, as other inner city adolescents of any ethnic background, were "drawn to the aesthetics of hip-hop culture, including clothing and hair styles, music tastes, as well as a way of talking that seems to have features of African American vernacular English, or what many locally refer to as an urban vernacular, due to its widespread use among youth" (p. 106).

By shedding the perception of "foreignness" associated with their Muslim and Somali identity, participants attained a sense of political empowerment that put them on collision course with the fellow non-Black Muslim college students. As previously discussed, Islam in the post 9/11 environment assumed attributes that are historically ascribed to racial minorities (Garner & Selod, 2014) and Muslim Americans came to be racialized as "Brown" people predominantly of the Middle Eastern and South East origin

(Gatonda, 2011). The essentialization of Muslims as Brown people of Middle Eastern and South East Asian descent is related to the corollary construction of Asians as a "model minority." As Park (2008) argued, the "model minority myth reinforces established racial inequalities and places second-generation Asian Americans within a precarious dilemma in which they must constantly prove their worth as 'real' Americans."

Examination of the strategies used by Brown Muslim students of Middle Eastern and South East Asian descent in comparison to those employed by Black Muslim Somali students in reacting to acts of Islamophobia reveals that their different approaches follow from the different racialization experiences. Whereas Middle Eastern and South East Asian students, according to the participants of this dissertation project, tend to be from frames of "marginal status" of model minority (Park, 2008), Somali students' approach the same issues as Blacks rooted in the tradition of robust civil rights activism of African Americans and hence see their citizenship status as less marginal relative to that of their fellow Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian Muslim college students. (Park, 2008).

Islamophobia has been a common theme on college campuses in the post 9/11 era but there has an uptick of prejudice against Muslim students in the wake of the campaign and election of president Donald Trump (Al-Sharif & Pasque, 2016). Muslim students use a variety of strategies to counter the hostile campus climate engendered by the association of Islam with terrorism (Naber, 2005). As Hall (2012) argues, how immigrants develop their identity is contingent upon the choices and opportunities afforded to them as they negotiate their identities in the contextual environments in which their lives are embedded.

To summarize, racialization, as Bigelow (2010) observes "is a process in which race becomes a key way of defining oneself or being defined by others" (p. 100). The findings from this dissertation project demonstrate that race became the defining feature of Somali college students. The findings also show that how the processes of racialization factors into the contextual environments of family, school, and social spaces depends on historical circumstances and sociopolitical conditions. As Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown (2016) argued, these circumstances and conditions determine the option of racial affiliations available to different ethnic groups.

Somali college students' perceptions about their ethnic identity and the contextual factors that shaped it. Like racial identity, participants described the patterns of their ethnic identity in terms of contextual factors that influenced the development of this dimension of their identity and the impact of the intersections of the multiple identities they embody. The key contextual factors that shaped their ethnic identity was participants' families and the influences of their Somali peers in the context of campus where the sense of community among members of the Somali Student Association (SSA) served as a source of solidarity and belonging.

Participants described how memories and stories their parents shared with them influenced their sense of what it means to be Somali. Barkhad shared how the stories he heard from his parents shaped his attitudes towards Somalia and being Somali, saying "they tell me just how peaceful and great it was to be around like area where is was complete homogeneous, completely Somali people around, like how great of an experience that is." The longings for their parents' homeland such as the one related by

Barkhad was a common theme among participants. The romanticized notions about their ancestral homeland and desire to return in the future provided participants shared ideas about their past and future which served as means for solidarity and belonging to one another.

The intersectionality of the multiple identities of Somali college students impacted their notions of ethnic identity. Several participants described their involvement with student affinity clubs that could not meet their sense of belonging or were alienating because these clubs would not embrace the totality of their identity. An example of how the climate at one of these clubs resulted in the oppression of one aspects of their identities was the multiethnic Muslim students' center. Participants shared how they were drawn to the center because of their Islamic heritage and how they become alienated from it because the Black experiences were erased from it. The experiences at the Muslim student center had the effect of solidifying the sense of Somali identity as the Somali Student Association had created a "safe space," as one participant put it, for them where the multiplicity of their identities were celebrated.

Researchers view ethnic identity development as a process that emerges from dialectical tension between how society depicts members of particular ethnic group and how these members define the groups to which they belong. (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Phinney, 1990). Others such as Umaina-Taylor et al. (2014) argue that ethnic identity is closely intertwined with other dimensions of identity such as race and therefore argue for a more inclusive definition, contending that ethnic identity is a "construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group memberships,

as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time" (p. 23). For ethnic minority students such as Somalis, as Quintana (1998) suggests, young adulthood is a time of examination and internalization of the norms of their ethnic groups. The modes in which college students explore the values of their ethnicities unfold within environmental contexts. Such environmental contexts, as outlined in Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model, include multiple environmental systems, some of which encompass the individual which are "proximate" such as macrosystems of family or school, while others are "distal," such as macrosystems which include cultural creeds and historical events that leave lasting impact on the collective consciousness of their ethnicities (Umaina-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 30). Umana-Taylor et al. contend that historical events, such as the causes of immigration, are critical in understanding the ethnic identity development of immigrant college students. They note that literature on ethnic identity development tends to neglect the forced and involuntary nature of segments within immigrant communities such those who were forcibly exiled from their homeland because "most [ethnic and racial identity] research on children from immigrant backgrounds presumes a voluntary legal migration history, which is a problematic approach to understanding immigration." (2014, p. 32).

Due to the forced and involuntary nature of much of the Somali immigration to the United States, I argue that the construct of diaspora is the most effective way of examining the identity development of Somali college students and the impact of the multiple environmental contexts in which their lives are embedded in the formation of that identity. As Gilroy (1993) argues, diaspora is useful construct in studying the

developmental experiences of immigrants due to "its ability to pose the relationship between ethnic sameness and differentiation: a changing same" (p. 90). In her study of racialized identities of young Somali immigrants, Bigelow (2010) advocates grounding the studies of identity formation of Somali immigrants in the construct of diaspora "because of the fact that being 'Somali' still matters to many who have left Somalia; and that the notion of 'Somaliness' still has great power in the ethos of Somali communities and identities around the globe" (p. 3).

Diasporic identity does not evolve in a sociopolitical vacuum. The construction of diasporic identity is a response to diaspora's positionality as sociopolitical space of host society. According to Safran, "members of diaspora communities are by turns mistreated by the host country as 'strangers within the gates' or welcomed or exploited for the sake of the domestic and diplomatic interests of the host country" (1991, p. 92). Several participants, for example, talked about how law enforcement agencies mistreat Muslim youth with programs that stigmatize and criminalize them. They singled out the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) initiative known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). According to DHS, CVE has "become a key focus of DHS's work to secure the homeland" (para. 2) The introduction of CVE in Minneapolis followed after an estimated 20 or so young Somalis were alleged to have left the United States to join terrorist organizations in Syria (MPR, 2015). The program purports to accomplish to secure the United States homeland by addressing "root causes of violent extremism by providing resources to communities to build and sustain local prevention efforts and promote the use of counter-narratives to confront violent extremist messaging online"

(DHS, 2016, para. 2). However, critics claim that the CVE unjustifiably labels Muslims as potential threats and as the result subjects them to intrusive surveillance and entrapment in violation of their constitutional rights. According to Bremen Center for Justice at New York University Law School, CVE singles out "Muslims, stigmatizing them as a suspect community. These programs have further promoted flawed theories of terrorist radicalization which lead to unnecessary fear, discrimination, and unjustified reporting to law enforcement" (Brennan Center for Justice, 2015, para. 2).

Each of the participants who mentioned CVE and its deleterious impact on Muslims agreed with the Brennan Center for Justice's assessment on the program. One of the participants, Warsame, expressed his views on this program, its racialized nature, and how it's unfair to young Muslim Somalis. He expressed his opposition to the program stating "I'm very critical of that program, like what their trying to do is they're trying to say all Somali American youth living in the Twin Cities are all potential terrorist." Warsame added that "they [government] don't say that about White people, they don't have these programs for White kids who end up being shooters, but then they're just trying to say, every single Somali has the potential to become a terrorist. And we have to de-radicalize them." These experiences of mistreatment and exclusion reinforced diasporic feelings of longing for the return of homeland were their belonging would not be questioned.

Diasporic consciousness was further contributed by peer influences in the context of college. As Brown (1990) argued, youth develop peer groups as a mechanism to distinguish themselves from older generations. The influence of peer groups is

particularly effective during college years when young adult students are faced with the developmental tasks of finding their place in society and working out questions relating to their identity (Erikson, 1968). Umana-Taylor et al. argue that considering the disproportionate "amount of time that youth spend outside of the family context (in school, with peers, and at work) during early adolescence and beyond, it is critical to understand the role that nonfamilial socialization agents and contexts play in the process" of forming ethnic identities (2014, p. 31).

As Bigelow notes, for young Somalis in the western world, that diasporic identity is "imagined in the sense that it is not a concrete, actual community in everyday terms but rather a sense of belonging, an abstract affinity, and even a sense of loyalty associated with the community or, in this case, nation" (2010, p. 3). The development of Somali college students' diasporic identity should be examined within the contextual environments that shape it. As Safran suggested, diasporic feelings are products host society's tendency to keep to exclude immigrant communities as "strangers within the gates" (1991, p. 92). The exclusions that Somali college students who participated in this dissertation project identified were layered and multiple. This sense of belonging they draw from their diasporic identifications allows them overcome the feelings of alienation that results from being otherized and discriminated against not only by the general public but also by their peers, whose identities intersected in ways that obviated their sense of belonging and subsequently necessitated them to imagine a community of their own guided and inspired by emotional attachments and diasporic yearnings of their parents' homeland.

Somali college students' perceptions about their religious identity and the contextual factors that shaped it. In addition to racial and ethnic identity, religious identity emerged from the data as a salient dimension. As with racial and ethnic identity, the perceptions participants' religious identity of participants were influenced by contextual factors of family and the intersectional experiences of multiple identities in the context of college. The patterns of the development of religious identity followed along similar trajectories as those of the racial and ethnic identities. Participants described experiences of being raised by families whose religion was a central organizing principle of their lives. However, as they grew up and become college students, religious identity was experienced at the intersection of their other aspects of their identities such as race and ethnicity. In so doing, religion took a meaning different from how they experienced it as children.

Participants recalled the role religion played during their lives growing up in first generation immigrant families. They described their experiences of attending Islamic schools and their families' efforts to transmit their religious values to their children. Samira, a female participant noted that growing up, "religion was more of a big deal and I'd go to like Ducksy [Islamic school]" because she came from a religious family. However, she pointed out that in her current role as a college student, religion became another identity, like her race, to defend from stigmatization and Islamophobia. Deeq observed that "people really don't understand Islam" and he felt it was his duty to counter the distorted image that others might have about his religion.

The intersection of religious and gender identities was a factor in influencing the formation of religious identity. A female participant, Ladan, commented on the gender aspect of religion, saying “for a guy it’s completely different but for a girl you have to cover,” referencing the Islamic dress code for females. Their identification as Somali females within the context of Islam meant that female Somalis faced more scrutiny and attracted negative attention, making their religious identity more salient than for male Somalis.

The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem in the Social-Ecological model provided a suitable framework to study the contextual influences on the saliency of multiple identities of Somali college students. The microsystem includes “the proximal process” of family, community, and college and the interactive influences of these systems which in the social-ecological model are referred to as messosystems and had a tangible influence on the identity development of participants. Participants’ religious identity was also sharply influenced by the role of elements in the exosystem such as mass media, governmental policies, and societal forces. The individual characteristics that allow these students to deploy their personal agency as they interact with the multiple contexts in which their lives are nested are what Bronfenbrenner called “developmentally instigative characteristics” (1993, p. 11). Renn contends that “by shaping individuals’ interactions with others in the environment, developmentally instigative characteristics influence the process of, for example, identity development” (2003, p. 387).

Findings from other researchers point to the salience of religious dimension of identify among Somali immigrants in the western world (Abdi, 2007; McGown, 1999; Bigelow, 2010). In fact, it is nearly impossible to disentangle what it means to be Somali from what it means to be Muslim, so closely are these identities intertwined (McGown, 1999; Bigelow, 2010; Collet, 2007). The increased salience of religious aspects among first generation Somali immigrants in comparison to the other dimensions of their identities is a phenomenon that has been observed from other immigrant communities in general and in particular Muslim immigrants, who immigrated from countries where their faith was dominant religion but found themselves as members of a religious minority group in their new homeland (Haddad, 1994; Peek, 2004).

Smith (1978) attributes this increased role of religion in the lives of immigrants to the experiences of immigration. He describes the process of immigration as "theologizing experience" in which immigrants fall back to religious identities as a means to build social capital and spiritual community (p. 1175). Other researchers explained the increased religiosity among Somali immigrants "as a strategy to create a familiar cultural space in response to an otherwise strange and alien value system" (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007, p. 89). While this argument might be true for the first-generation Somali immigrants who have the need to recreate the cultural and spiritual milieu of the old country in their new environment, it is not the case for the second-generation Somali immigrants who were born in the United States or came during their childhood, as was the case for most of the participants in this dissertation project. These findings suggest that Somali college students' religious identity develops in the context of current

sociopolitical conditions of the country, their personal agency, and the influences of the institutional practices and norms of the wider society and particularly in their collegiate environments.

The salience of religious identity is further contributed by the intersection of race and religion. Selod and Embrick (2013) argue that treatment of Muslim Americans in the age of the ongoing "War on Terror" can be fully understood through the lens of "religious racialization" where religion becomes a proxy for race and practitioners of that religion, in this case Islam, are subjected to the discriminatory policies and practices akin to racially inspired bigotry. They contend that religious racialization "provides the appropriate language to talk about the details of how racial meanings are applied to Muslim men and women's bodies" (p. 652) They further argue that the concept of Islamophobia which has been used as a term to explain the discrimination against Muslims is insufficient to capture the experiences of Muslim Americans in the post 9/11 era as it is "conceptualized as a form of phobia toward a religion rather than a label for discriminatory actions against Muslims" (p. 649) They propose the concept of religious racialization since a "new framework is necessary that allows for an examination of the experiences of people with anti-Muslim racism" (p. 649).

Somali college students' perceptions about their gender identity and the contextual factors that shaped it. The perception of gender identity was influenced by construction of womanhood in Somali families, gendered educational outcomes where female Somali college students outnumbered and outperformed their male counterparts academically and, as previously noted, intersections of gender and religion in the context

of college. Female participants discussed how their families socialized in gender roles at home through the gendered division of labor and gendered extra-curricular activities. Hodan, a female participant commented on how parents "got so mad cause my cousin went to the kitchen [because] he's a boy." She explained how this gendered division of labor made her think about patriarchy and male privilege in Somali family, saying "I m like, like why, I'm in the kitchen, like, are you making it seem like he's too good to be in the kitchen."

Participants' gender salience was further shaped the differential academic outcomes that favored females. Both females and males were convinced that Somali males, though they were privileged over females in the context of family, were less likely to excel in the educational environment compared to Somali females. Hodan observed that "if you look at Somali, if you look at Somali female students, and if you look at Somali male students, you would see a huge difference between, like, the ratio, and these girls are doing big things, and then guys, they're not really doing much." This perception of female academic superiority empowered females to challenge the patriarchy traditions and gendered norms, contributing the salience of gender identity in the process.

Gender dynamics in Somali families are defined as patriarchal and rooted in Islamic gender norms where men exercise authority over women (Kapteijns, 1999). An additional factor found to be contributing to the salience of identity of female participants was the religious racialization imposed on Somalis in America. Somalis in Minnesota are overwhelmingly followers of Islamic faith (Yusuf, 2012). Since practicing female Muslims are publicly identifiable by their dress code, the hijab, they become vulnerable

to religiously inspired racialization marked by harassment and discrimination (Cainkar, 2009).

Some studies have found the correlation between gendered socialization with respect to the stricter parental controls on the part of immigrant female students and their higher educational achievement. Findings from Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (LISA), a component of Harvard Immigration Project that was launched in 1997 and followed immigrant students from China, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Central America for five years, suggested that "both children and parents indicated that girls were supervised much more strictly than boys in daily activities and dating. Children had a clear perception of their parents' double standards in supervision" (Qin, 2006, p. 11).

Other research further concluded that such gendered controls affects female students' developmental trajectories but was also found to have had a positive impact on female students' educational outcomes (Espiritu, 2001). The controls meant to enforce gender propriety had the additional effect of reducing girls' likelihood of engaging in antisocial behaviors (Smith, 2002). Furthermore, as Qin (2006) argued, "as a result of stricter parental control, girls are likely to spend more time at home, focusing more on their studies than boys" (p. 12)

Somali college students and the different meanings they attach to their collegiate experiences. Somali college students associated different meanings with each of their multiple identities in the context of college. The racial dimension of their identity was more likely to connote activism and political engagement whereas their ethnic

identity served as source of belonging and solidarity. Religion and gender, while stable components of their sense of self, were not associated with particular qualitative meanings.

Most studies on the ethnic and racial identity formation of underrepresented college students tend to situate student's identity "in a particular stage along a particular developmental sequence" (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 24). These studies are derived from Erikson's (1968) psychosocial research on human development where individual development linearly unfolds along sequence of stages preceded by precipitating "crises" that set the scene for the stage (p. 48). The emphasis of these stage-oriented models such as Phinney's (1992) and Cross' (1991) is on the "universal properties" of ethnic identity development which downplays the significance of the unique histories of different ethnic groups and generalizes the "process of becoming Black" that ranges from lacking racial awareness and moves through stages of increasing racial salience which culminates in achieving identity (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 24). Unlike these two approaches, the findings of this dissertation project are not concerned with situating the identity of Somali college students along a sequence of developmental stages inspired by Erikson's (1968) human development theory nor do they ignore the unique history of Somali college students in their examination of the formation of their identity as college students.

The findings of this dissertation reveal four major dimensions of the identity of Somali college students. These dimensions of racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms are shaped by the multiple contextual environments in which the lives and histories of Somali college students are embedded.

The resulting model illustrates how dynamic and interactive contextual factors of family, society, and institutions of higher education influence salience and the meaning that Somali college students attach to the dimensions of their religious, gender, racial and ethnic identities. The "significance" that Somali college students place on the different dimensions of their identity and their "interpretations of what it means" to espouse these multiple dimensions of their identities closely mirror the formulation of Seller's et al. (1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). Unlike stage-oriented and universalistic models of Cross (1991) and Phinney (1992), Seller's et al. MMRI "focuses on the significance and the nature of an individual's racial identity" (p. 24). MMRI depicts:

> [F]our dimensions of racial identity in African Americans: the salience of identity; the centrality of the identity; the ideology associated with the identity; and the regard in which the person holds African Americans. The first two dimensions address the significance of race in the individual's self-definition; the second two dimensions address the qualitative meaning that the individual ascribes to being Black (Sellers, et al. (1998).

Whereas Sellers et al., (1998) conceptualization illustrates the dimensions of single identity, namely racial identity, the themes that have emerged in this dissertation illustrate how participants associate similar values and meanings identified in Sellers et al. (1998) model not just with race but religion, gender, race and ethnicity. Although MMRI focusses on racial identity, the underlying concepts of "significances" and the meanings from which individuals draw can be applied to other themes of identities that

emerged from this dissertation. Thus, the significances Somali college students attached to their four key dimensions of identity as well as the what these dimensions meant to them can best be understood through the four different dimensions of racial identity proposed by MMRI. Salience in Sellers et al. (1998) conceptualization of racial identity denotes an individual's tendency to define him or herself in racial term in context whereas centrality "refers to the extent to which a person normatively defines himself or herself with regard to race" (p. 25). Put it in other words, salience is situational whereas centrality is not influenced by the situation. The findings from this dissertation study reveal that among Somali college students, the racial dimension of their identity tended to be more situational whereas their characterization of the religious dimension was closer to the concept of centrality. There was, however, a gendered quality to this characterization. While male Somali college students tended to be perceived as Blacks by the wider society based on their racial phenotypes, Somali females were likely to be publicly identifiable as Muslims based on their religiously requisite dress code of hijab. Nonetheless, the increasing racialization of Islam and the continued ascription of racial meanings to Islamic faith over the past two decades sometimes blurred the relative contextual saliences of religious and racial identities (Gotanda, 2011; Selods & Embrick, 2013). Despite this, religious dimension of identity was less sensitive to contexts than racial dimension and hence fits Sellers et al. (1998) concept of centrality than salience which is susceptible to contextual influences.

Among female participants, gendered parental regulations and gendered divisions of domestic labor reinforced gender as a significant aspect of self-concept. Most male and

female participants lived with their families as college students and therefore were conscious about the contrast between the views of construction of womanhood in the patriarchy normed Somali households and the less gendered contexts outside home. The "agential negotiations across" these contexts made gender a significant aspect of female participants' interpretation of what it means to be Somali college student (McGuire et al., 2016, p. 326). This, in turn, gave rise to the centrality of gender as "relatively stable" dimension of identity across different contexts of home and society (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 25).

The third dimension in MMRI is *racial regard.* Racial regard "refers to a person's affective and evaluative judgment of her or his race in terms of positive-negative valence" (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 26). In these findings, racial regard was reflected by the meanings Somali college students attached to their ethnicity. Participants' construction of notions of "Somaliness" was diasporic in nature in that "they retain a collective memory [and] vision" about an idealized ancestral homeland which "they continue to relate, personally or vicariously." (Safran, 1991, p. 83). Participants also displayed pride in their ethnicity as Somalis and cohesion that served their need to belong. Yet despite their idealized notions of diasporic ethnic identity, participants were also aware of the public perception of Somalia as place associated with war, famine, terrorism, and piracy. Their intense positive feeling towards their ethnicity in spite of the negativity that the general American public associates with anything Somali can best be understood through the conceptualization of "private regard" and "public regard" proposed by MMRI. In Sellers et al. (1998) formulation, "private regard" refers to the "extent to which individuals feel

positively or negatively towards" their racial group whereas "public regard" refers to their awareness of how their racial group are viewed by others (p. 26). In both instances, Somali college students exhibited high positive private regard and high negative public regard meaning they felt closeness, pride, and solidarity about being Somali while at the same time feeling that the broader society was highly negative and hostile to their community. Researchers have explained the high positive private regard as a mechanism that helps oppressed minorities from internalizing the oppression of the majority (Broman, Jackson, & Neighbors, 1989; McAdoo, 1985). This seemed to be the case with the Somali college students interviewed for this study, as the feelings of solidarity helped them find a safe space and belonging in the face of the multiple marginalizations based on their race, religion, and ethnicity they were experiencing both on and off campus.

The fourth dimension in Sellers et al. (1998) conceptualization of identity is "ideology." Ideology is defined as the "individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to the way she or he feels that the members of the race should act" (p. 27). For the Somali college students who participated in this dissertation study, this dimension was expressed through identification with the African American struggle for civil and human rights. They felt shared experiences of racism with the wider Black community. Being Black meant being politically engaged and being active in the struggle for civil rights. Furthermore, by subordinating their ethnic and religious identity to that racial identity as Black political subjectivities and grounding their experiences with racism and struggle for equality within the broader Black struggle for civil rights served as an empowering experience. They felt that being Somali carried a foreign connation and in the context of

struggle for equality would not help them advance their cause. Their co-religionist non-Black Muslims tended to opt for more "assimilationist" approach which emphasized identification with the mainstream society (Sellers, et al., 1998, p. 28).

The tendency of non-Black Muslim students to adapt more assimilationist approach is related to racialization of Muslims in America as "Browns" of Middle Eastern and South East Asian descent, erasing the experiences of Black Muslims in the process (Gotanda, 2011). Park (2008) attributes the assimilationist posture that Asian Americans tend to adapt to the notion of "model minority," where full citizenship of Asian Americans is predicated upon their relegation to second class citizenships. She argues that "despite their legal citizenship, [Asian Americans] continue to hold a foreigner status" (p. 134). In contrast, being Blacks allowed Somali students to adapt a more "nationalist" ideology which as Sellers et al.(1998) note, "posits that African Americans should be in control of their own destiny" (p. 27). Several participants contrasted the assimilationist approaches mostly espoused by non-Black Muslim college students of mostly Middle Eastern and South Eastern descent and their own nationalist outlook, which they described as "unapologetically Black" and was not concerned with placating the White power structure on and off campus. These racially inspired divergent approaches coupled with feelings of erasure of the Black experience led some Black Muslims to leave the main Muslim student organization and form their own Black Muslim student group. Their new group tended to be less assimilationist and more activist oriented.

Findings from this dissertation demonstrate how the intersections of religion, gender, race and ethnicity shape identity of Somali college students, the meanings that students attach to the multiple dimensions of their identity and how these dimensions amplify and erase each other relative to contextual factors of family, society and college campus. The findings also high light the importance of heterogeneity among religious and racial groups as well as the generational nuances within Somali community. Further, the findings illustrate how intersections of these identities inform, complicate, and problematize what it means to embody multiple identities as well as the strategic negotiations it takes to navigate living at the intersections of multiple marginalities.

While this study integrated the Model of Multidimensional Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) and Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model to inform the investigation of Somali college students' identity formation, Sellers' et al. (1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) was particularly helpful in analyzing the meanings that Somali college students associate with different dimensions of identities. The processes of identity development are impacted by the intersections of multiple identities and the complex contextual environments in which their lives are embedded. Although MMRI ostensibly focuses on racial identity, the dimensions that make up its components are critical in understanding how Somali students interpret what it means to be Muslim, female, Black and Somali.

In examining the ethnic identity development of Somali college students, I draw from Safran's (1991) classical formulation of the construct of diaspora. Safran argued that the concept should be adapted as a framework to examine the experiences of

diaspora communities that embodies most of the six criteria that distinguishes it from other immigrant communities with voluntary immigration histories. These rules are:

1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions;
2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements;
3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
4) they regard their ancestral home-land as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate;
5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

The majority of the participants of this dissertation project met most of the elements in Safran's (1991) criteria for conceptualization of diaspora and described their ethnic identity in diasporic terms. They spoke of themes of uprooting and tragic displacement from their homeland which permeated their collective memory. They also discussed how hostile environments of racism, Islamophobia, and racism exacerbate their multiple marginalities of their identities as Black, Muslim and immigrants and diminish

their sense of citizenship. These multiple marginalizations that define their positionality within the social order of the mainstream society, in turn, reinforce their diasporic consciousness of belonging and desire to return to the parents' homeland. Many of the interviewees spoke of the obligation they felt to restore their parents' homeland to its former glory. Most importantly for the purpose of investigating the development of their ethnic identity, they associated their parents' homeland "personally or vicariously" in a such a way that "their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity" were defined by their thoughts and feelings towards that homeland (Safran, 1991, p. 84).

Safran (1991) emphasizes that the desire to return to the homeland should be seen as a "myth" rather than a physical return which serves as mechanism to build ethnic identity and solidarity. He insists that for number of reasons, diaspora communities:

> [D]o not go "home"—because there is no homeland to which to return; because, although a homeland may exist, it is not a welcoming place with which they can identify politically, ideologically, or socially; or because it would be too inconvenient and disruptive, if not traumatic, to leave the diaspora. In the meantime, the myth of return serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and solidarity when religion can no longer do so, when the cohesiveness of the local community is loosened, and when the family is threatened with disintegration (p. 91).

Additionally, Safran's (1991) conceptualization of diaspora as a construct to examine the experiences of immigrants was indispensable in understanding the strong influences of notions of "Somaliness" rooted in participants' ancestral homeland as well

as the sense of solidarity and belonging they draw from their diasporic consciousness. This incorporation of diaspora construct as an analytic tool was necessitated by the fact that Somalia as a homeland is still figured prominently in the imagination of participants. The high positive regard they attach to the notions of "Somaliness" helped participants find a safe space to belong and cope the "challenges of embodying and living diaspora as multiplicities of places and ideas in a world lethally committed to material and ideological borders" as Black Muslim immigrants in contextual environments where racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia are common place (McGuire et al., 2016, p. 327)

The perception of discrimination and its relation to strong ethnic identity has been noted number of researchers. In their rejection–identification model, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) explained that exclusionary environments lead to increased ethnic solidarity. Other studies observed that ethnic identity is reinforced when individuals find themselves in a discriminatory environment because of the human need for belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995). The participants interviewed for this dissertation project described their experiences with pervasive discrimination and felt their only source for belonging and solidarity was their diasporic community. With this in mind, the construction of Somali diasporic identity should be seen as an effort to fulfill their need as it allows diasporic communities to simultaneously belong both its current country of residence and the homeland from which they were forcibly uprooted (Safran, 1991).

Implications

The dissertation project contributes to alleviating the scarcity in literature on the experiences of Somali college students. Somali students like other immigrant groups are a rarely studied and often misunderstood population (Citizens League, 2007; Kapteijns & Arman, 2008; Kim & Diaz, 2013). Absence of knowledge on their collegiate and educational experiences has deleterious effects on their educational and psychosocial wellbeing. A key contribution that this dissertation makes to the scarce literature on Somali students is the new knowledge on the processes in which the different dimensions of the religious, gender, racial, and ethnic identities intersect and the dynamic web of environmental contexts that shape the salience of these dimensions.

The project also contributes to the scholarly discourse by using the construct of diaspora to examine immigrant identity development. It adds complexity to how researchers approach the role that diasporic consciousness and long-distance nationalism play in the formation of second generation Somali college students' identity. The fact that Somali college students maintain strong diasporic attributes such as longing for their parents' homeland and belonging rooted in the memories of that homeland while displaying nationalistic Black ideology complicates what it means to be Black. Equally important is the salience of gender identity in response to the gendered norms and patriarchy infused Somali households, as well as their subsequent emergent agential negotiations, that female Somali college students engage in with their families in order to imagine and construct a sense of womanhood less reliant on patriarchy, through the leveraging of their perceived stronger educational outcomes relative to Somali males.

Additionally, the project illustrates intersections of religious and racial identities, and the politics of race in racially heterogeneous Muslim student groups on campus. Finally, the project reveals the generational nuances involved in how Somali college students foreground their racial identity as Blacks and how this sets the stage for a generational contestation where Somali parents view their children's salient Black identity as negation of the "Somaliness" and Somali college students strategically perceive their Blackness as empowering experience in the context of their lives as political subjectivities in America whose fate is tied to that of broader Black community.

Implications for research. The themes that emerged from this dissertation project have numerous implications for research. Scholars of immigrant college students' identity should consider the intersectionality and its impact on the different dimensions of identity. The construction of womanhood in Somali households and the influence of the intersections of religion and gender dynamics that give rise to gendered parenting and its implication for gendered educational outcomes need to be examined. Similarly, the intensified racialization of Islam in the Trump presidency era and its impact on the experiences of Somali students in general and female Somali students, who embody the symbols of Islam such as hijab in public, warrants further research. Equally important is examining the racialization processes of Somalis as Black immigrants and their agential negotiations to foreground their racial identity to place their experiences within the wider arch of history of the struggle for civil rights. Finally, the intersections of religion and race in the context of ethnically and racially diverse Muslim student groups on campus as

well as the nuances in how the multiple dimensions of the identities of these groups amplify and erase each other need to be interrogated.

The findings of this dissertations were based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 41 participants compromising of 23 female and 18 male Somali college students in one large research university in the Midwest. Given that this is a growing yet understudied demographic the findings from this qualitative study should not be generalized to all Somali college students. A larger study with multiple campuses and mixed methods should be the next step in refining the themes that describe the processes of Somali college identity development.

The findings suggest the distinctive experiences of the second-generation Somali immigrants who formed majority of participants. Participants often contrasted their perceptions of what it means to be Muslim Black Somalis in America with those of their first-generation parents. The divergent generational splits, particularly in matters relating to the construction of womanhood and Black subjectivities, need to examined further. This will require a multigenerational sample of participants.

Implications for practice. The findings of the study have several implications for practice. Practitioners of higher education should particularly pay attention to how the intersections of religion, gender, race, and ethnicity impact students with multiple identities and their educational equity. When the lens of intersectionality is adapted to examine the experiential challenges faced by students who embody multiple identities, the multiple marginalization they experience becomes clearer. In her analyses of the experiences of Black women, Crenshaw (1989) advanced intersectionality as a

framework, “in order to contrast the multidimensionality of Black women's experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences” (p. 140). In doing so, she revealed how institutions slanted the racial discrimination faced by Black women by pointing to the presence of critical mass of Black men in the fabric of their institutions while at the same using the integration of White women into their educational and work places to counter the claims of gender discrimination faced by Black women. To address the erasure of Black women’s experiences, Crenshaw (1989) proposed the incorporation of gender and race into a single intersectional category that captures the experiences of Black women. Her analyses made the imperative of intersectionality a compelling framework when it comes to addressing the deleterious effects of embodying multiple marginalities. As Torres et al. (2009) argue, an intersectionality framework:

> provides a lens both for investigating identity development and for bringing a focus on identity (e.g., dynamics of race, class, gender) to a full range of questions relevant to student development, such as retention, student involvement, campus community, and equity. For example, given the theoretical interventions noted here, student affairs educators could design programs or develop policy with the experiences of underrepresented students at the center of the process, rather than assuming majority student experiences apply to everyone (p.588).

Participants in this dissertation project described their struggles that embodying a multiplicity of identifications entailed and the resultant difficulties in fitting into the existing campus organizations conceived to accommodate students who shared some aspects of their identity but not the totality of their identities. This resulted in situations

where Somali students became alienated from affinity groups who shared either religious identity or racial identity but not both. Higher education practitioners should consider intersectionality when considering the educational equities of immigrant students like Somalis.

A second area where the findings from this dissertation study has implications for practice is campus climate. A number of participants discussed their concern for the raising Islamophobia and xenophobia on campus. They cited incidents of micro-aggressions and hostilities that negatively impact their psychosocial wellbeing and their educational outcomes. Several participants noted the increasingly hostile campus climate and their concerns for safety. The institutionalized micro-aggressions students face when accessing services such as the student service offices or library coupled with fear and anxiety engendered by experiences of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the age of Trump have the potential to negatively affect Somali students' educational outcomes and psychosocial wellbeing. Student affairs practitioners and administrators need to find innovative ways of addressing these concerns.

The nexus between campus climate and student identity development has been widely noted. Torres et al., (2003) argued that in order to undertake sound and relatable assessments of campus climate and its impact on diverse student body, it is imperative for higher education practitioners and leaders to understand and examine nuances and trajectories of identity formation of diverse student body. Such understanding begins with listening to students and empowering their voices. Immigrant students are already participating in social justice activities intended to combat racism, Islamophobia, and

xenophobia on and off-campus as evidenced by their engagement with federal law enforcement programs in civil rights issues such as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) which they feel unfairly stigmatizes them. Colleges and universities should provide institutional support to the organic work in which student leaders are engaging. This will go a long way in improving campus climate as it empowers students to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Researchers have noted the relationship between the processes as well as the contextual environment that shape identity formation and students' capacity to belong to their institutions of learning (Cohen & Garcia, 2010; Cooper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). As Cohen and Garcia (2010) noted, students' multiple identities impact their capacity to experience "sense of belonging" in their collegiate environment as well as their drive to attain their educational goals (p. 365). Cooper (2009) suggested that practitioners of higher education should create conditions that promote the development of students' social identities as means to enhance their sense of belonging to campus environment, arguing, as previously mentioned, for "purposeful cultivation of collective identity among a diverse student body" (p. 1) In the same fashion, Strayhorn (2012) argues that it order to assess students' sense of belonging to their collegiate environments, it is imperative to examine the contextual factors that impact the formation of their identities. He further contends for the promotion of students' sense of belonging as a means of promoting educational equity, noting while 25% of student dropout is attributed to academic performances and another 15% is associated with financial barriers, the remaining 60%

of student withdrawals from higher education institutions could be attributed to alienation from their institutions of learning (2012).

The findings from this dissertation project provide context for the multiple marginalizations that Somali college students face. Participants noted how the combination of a hostile campus climate and the alienation from the affinity groups with which they share partial religious or racial affiliations undermines their ability to be integrated into the campus social and academic fabric. Participants almost uniformly expressed their concerns for the lack of support for the Somali Student Association on the part of the university. They noted how they lack office spaces for the association. This is particularly important because the Somali Student Association was the only entity which most participants expressed an appreciation for its ability to provide a space to build peer solidarity and a sense of belonging with fellow Somali students. As Tinto (1975) argued, students who achieve academic and social integration are less likely to withdraw from college and that students develop academic and social integration by building healthy and meaningful peer relations. Participants noted meaningful relationships with their Somali college student peers as a source of support and shelter from the hostilities they experience on campus. Student affairs practitioners and administrators should build on strengths of originations such as the Somali Student Association as a way of promoting student sense of belonging as well as academic and social integration.

Peer support groups that immigrant students, such as the Somali participants in this dissertation, establish have been critical to their ability to “navigate” and “transition” to campus environments (Kim, 2009, p. 9). Higher education practitioners need to build

the capacity of these peer support groups by providing them with a dedicated contact person equipped with nuanced insights into student experiences and meaningful resources to sustain these networks. Advisors, counselors, student affairs personnel, and diversity officers should make use of these networks and support groups as a way to reach out to students and provide timely and holistic academic and developmental support to them (Stebleton, 2011).

Finally, the findings suggest the complexities involved in navigating multiple contextual environments of school and home demands. The processes of gender identity development entail negotiating the demands of the notions of womanhood in Somali culture and its attendant blend of Islamic proscribed norms and cultural patriarchy. Several female participants noted the increasingly complex intergenerational relationships resulting from their growing cognizance of gendered parenting norms and their increasing sense of agency in matters relating to career and education. They discussed how the gendered scrutiny on the part of their parents and the unrelenting familial pressures to marry at the end of their college education collides with their dreams for a career or advanced graduate education, and how this creates a stressful environment that has deleterious effect on their personal wellbeing. They further noted the psychological toll of this gendered expectations and how this exacerbates the stressors college students deal through the course of their education. These family stressors and the psychosocial difficulties they give rise to have implications for counseling for female Somali college students. College counselors and advisor need to be cognizant of the potential relationships between identity development and psychological wellbeing of

immigrant students as well as the role that student identity development plays in impeding or promoting healthy adjustment to campus environment among immigrant college students.

Colleges and Universities need to employ diverse counsellors and advisors trained to relate and address the concerns that students deal with throughout the course of their college educations. Student affairs programs and services need to create spaces where immigrant college students can discuss and explore their conflicting feelings about what it means to be a Somali college student with multiple identities and multiple marginalities with which to live. Studies have long noted how intersections of multiple identities create oppressive social conditions (Constantine & Watt, 2002; Crenshaw, 1989). Addressing the stressors rooted in the gender identities of college students and the contextual environments is critical in not only addressing personal and psychological wellbeing of students but it is also a mechanism to help students realize their educational and career aspirations as this helps them navigate the complex gender, cultural and familial expectations they encounter as female college students (Watt, 2003).

Summary

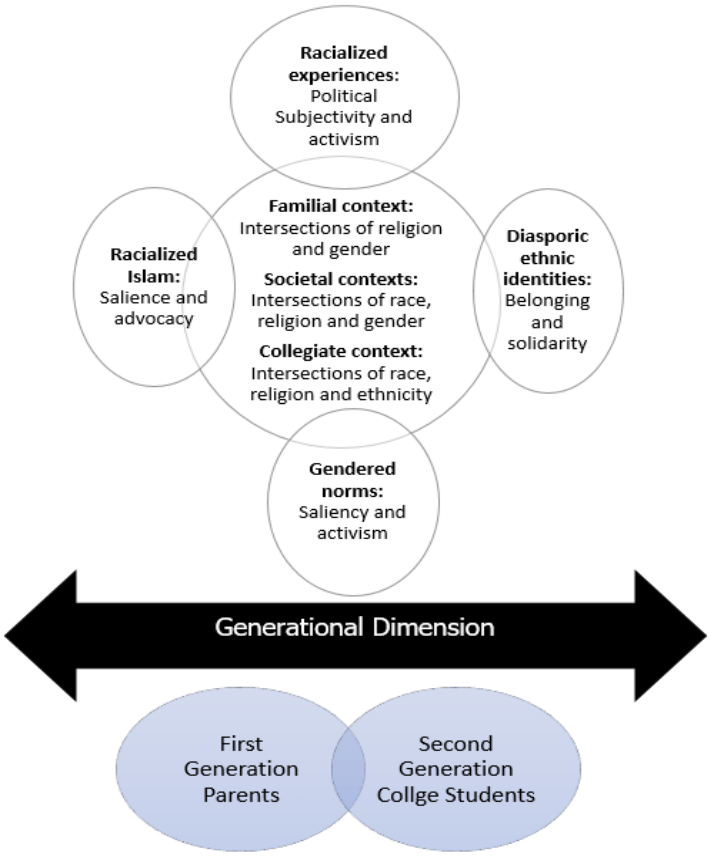

Figure 3: Potential model of Somali college identity development

As illustrated in Figure 3, the model depicts how experiences of intersectionality influence the multiple identities of Somali college students. Four major themes of identity dimensions emerged from the data. These dimensions – racialized experiences, diasporic ethnic identity, racialized Islam, and gendered norms – are filtered through and influenced by the three contextual factors of family, society, and college. The identity dimensions intersect and amplify each other in given contexts. Religion and gender tend to intersect with each within the context of family. The patriarchal traditions and Islamic

creeds intersect in influencing notions of femininity and construction womanhood in Somali families and therefore gives rise to gendered house chores and parenting practices. In the resulting gendered norms, the household chores and duties disproportionately fall on females as opposed to males. Similarly, the females are singled out for extra parental scrutiny as their sexuality and social life are tied to family honor and standing in the community. Combination of their subsequent marginalization makes gender more salient for females than males. Conversely, their relatively stronger educational outcomes compared to males provides a sense of agency inspired by feminism which empowers them challenge the patriarchy based gender inequality within their families. Additional contextual factor that contributes this salience are the religious and ethnic racialization that Somali female students are subjected to in societal and collegiate contexts due to their public visibility as Muslims based on hijab.

The model also illustrates the formation of racial identity and the emergence of Somali college students' political subjectivities as Blacks. The racialization that students experience in growing up in a society where race is the principle social order contributes to their sense of self as Blacks and their intentional effort to subordinate their religious and ethnic identity to their racial identity as Blacks as this enables them to articulate their grievances and struggle for equality in the framework of civil rights movement, politically empowering them in the process. This is particularly contributed by intersections of race and religion in the context of Muslim student center where Islam is equated with Middle Eastern and South East Asian identities, and Black Muslim identities are erased.

Additionally, the model depicts the emergence of Somali ethnic identity rooted in diasporic belongings of romanticized nostalgia and longing for ancestral homeland. The diasporic identity mainly serves as a source of belonging which could not be satisfied by other affinity groups which Somali college students are affiliated. These affinity groups either lack the major identity dimensions of Somali college students. Black Student Union which Somali students affiliate themselves with politically lacks the element of religion and Muslim Student Association where common faith supposed to create a shared sense of belonging is not congruent with their racial consciousness as Blacks.

Finally, the model displays the generational difference between how first generations Somalis parents and second generation Somali college students conceptualize their identities. Whereas religion and ethnicity dimensions tend be salient among the first-generation, the second-generation tends to display more salient gender, diasporic flavored ethnic and politically informed racial identities.

Conclusion

A recurring theme in participants' responses was their insight and appreciation for the unique spaces that they occupy as second generation immigrants with multiple intersecting identities of religion, gender, race, and ethnicity and multiple contextual environments to navigate as college students. A female participant, Ruweda, commented on what it means to embody her multiple marginalities noting, "I am Black Muslim women, a young Black Muslim, probably the most intersectional as it gets, and I feel like most ahh vulnerable to this American society and ahh, I feel like all the intersectionality's that I have is probably the most difficult to get out of or become American." The unique

space within which they occupy in the context of campus made them feel that they were unto a community of their own whom neither broader society nor their families appreciated or understood their experiences. It was against this backdrop that their responses were reflective of the sense of belonging and affinity they felt towards each other. Observing how intersections of her different identities negate each and how the Somali Student Association (SSA) space is the only space where her all identities are nurtured as well as how uniquely this space is important to her sense of belonging, a female participant, Ladan said, "Somali Student Association [SSA] where like every day if I don't go to SSA, I think I might lose my mind because I have to be around Somali people because no one understands us like we understand us."

The sense of belonging that participants felt in the presence of Somali students was associated with solidarity rooted in memories and longing for their parents' homeland. Ladan described the diasporic feelings that anchor her identity and the central role Somalia plays in the formation of that identity. She described how she introduced herself during the college orientations when the college staff instructed students to introduce themselves by sharing their name and their hometown. She noted that although she was born in Minnesota, she claimed Somalia as her "hometown" saying "I was like, 'Hi, my name is Ladan, I'm from Somalia but I grew up here' and like by my home is Somalia and I have to state that from the get-go because like I'm not going to claim here as my home." During the later stages of the dissertation project, observations like this made me think about the construct of diaspora and how diasporic feelings shape participants' identity and belonging. Their tendency to, as Safran (1991) argued, "relate,

personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity" came to define how they related to each other and how they about the world outside the intersections of their identities (p. 84).

Another emergent theme as the project progressed was participants' lived-in experiences with color lines that function as America's organizing social principle as Black immigrants while also being associated with the connotations of Somalia as a place wrecked by terrorism and war as well as racialized notions of Islam. As Bigelow (2010) argues that racializing experiences that Somali youth go through "needs to be conceptualized through the examination of identity intersections" (p. 154). A case in point of such an intersection of identity is how participants strategically chose to foreground their racial identity in their political positioning in order not to be marginalized as foreign immigrants. In doing so, they subordinated their racial identity relative to their religious identity as Muslims or their ethnic identity as Somalis. This was contrary to the findings from other researchers who studied first generation Somali and other African immigrants (Asante et al., 2016; Bigelow, 2010; Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007). Accordingly, in examining the processes racialization and negotiation strategies immigrants use, the role of generational dimension should be considered. Furthermore, Somali college students' embrace of Black narratives and activism in their positioning as political subjectivities had two effects. It empowered them in their struggle to assert their rights, but it also sharpened the color lines within Muslim community, particularly in the setting of Muslim student associations. The racial dynamics within Muslim Americans have historically been overlooked but has been subject of increasing media scrutiny in the

wake of rising Islamophobia following the candidacy and election of Trump (Green, 2017; Ochieng, 2017; Walid, 2016). These discussions transpired as non-Black Muslims shift their strategies from assimilationist approach that avoided social justice work to a more activist approach in synch with the tradition of civil rights activism in African American experience.

The realization of the emergence of themes of racialized religion, the gender identity that challenged gendered norms, political subjectivities as Blacks and diasporic feelings of ethnic solidarity and belonging led me to think about not just the importance of these dimensions in the self-conceptualizations of participants but also what meanings they associated with their different identities. The interpretation of the meanings of the different dimensions of participants' identities were informed by Sellers et al., (1998) formulation of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). While MMRI limits itself to examination of racial identity, its robust concepts of salience and significance of multiple dimensions of identities can be applied to the experiences of immigrant college students who live at the intersections of different identities.

Female participants felt gender was more relevant to their sense of identity due to the gendered norms at home and their identification with Islam symbolized by the attire of hijab they wear in public. In the current atmosphere where Islam is racialized (Selod & Embrick, 2013), participants emphasized their similarity with the wider Black community and were more likely to coach their experiences with racialization and strategies of confronting racism in the narratives of civil rights. Sellers et al., (1998) refers the relevance of identities such as gender and religion in individual's self-conceptualization

as “salience” whereas the tendency to emphasize one dimension is referred to as “centrality.” The diasporic feelings of longing and belonging that Somali college students displayed towards their community, in Seller’s et al. formulation are called “regard.” Given these findings that illustrate how different student demographics work out questions relating to identity in the context of their college experiences, scholars and practitioners of higher education need to explore innovative ways of providing support to students whose intersectional identities entail multiple lived-in oppressions particularly in the wake of current sociopolitical conditions.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear Member of Somali Student Association:

As you know, it is important to create college climate that promotes student success. In order to do this, colleges and universities need to understand student experiences. One of the best ways to understand student experience is by examining how their identities and how campus environment shapes their sense of self. I am conducting a study to investigate the identity development of Somali students. The The research focusses on subset of immigrant students, the Somali college students in Minnesota and their college experiences.

If you agree to participate in the study, I will have a 60 to 90 minute interview with you. At the end of the interview, I will ask you to take a brief demographic survey that will take no more than two minutes.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary you. You may choose not to take part in the study and they may stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. Participants can skip any questions that they do not wish to answer. There are no known physical or psychological risks associated with completing this survey, though some questions may be considered sensitive.

If you agree to the interview, you will receive a $20.00 gift certificate that you can use at Target Store.

There will be no records that identify participants. Names will not appear on the questionnaire, and responses will be kept confidential. All results will be presented in terms of group-level finding. Individual identities will not be reported, and published results will not refer to any individual or institution. This project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

This study is part of my PhD work at the University of Minnesota and will be the basis of my dissertation and subsequent academic presentations and publications.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me via email (adam0426@umn.edu) or telephone (612-987-6627), or contact my advisor, Professor Jarrett Gupton at gupton@umn.edu. Your participation is critical to this study, and I thank you most sincerely for considering this request.

Regards,

Jamal Adam.

Appendix B: Oral Script

Identity Development of Somali College Students.

Hi there! My name is Jamal Adam and I'm a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. I am conducting a study to investigate the identity development of Somali students. The research focusses on subset of immigrant students, the Somali college students in Minnesota and their college experiences. It argues for the investigation of the identity development of Somali students as a framework to understand their experiences during their undergraduate education. Such understanding is critical to educators responsible for the creation of institutional conditions that promote student success.

I'm looking for participants to interview for my study. If you agree to participate in the study, I will need your contact information in order to schedule the hour to an hour and half interview with you.

I'm doing this study for my doctoral dissertation. I'll use the results for my dissertation, in some articles and in some academic presentations. The results of this study will help colleges and universities understand the experiences of Somali students in higher education.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can stop at any time without penalty. You can decline to answer any question. If at any time you would like to stop working on the survey, please turn in your survey to me.

If you have any questions, please ask me now. If you have questions later, my contact information is on the consent information sheet. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line at the University of Minnesota, as explained on your consent information sheet.

Please read the consent information sheet before your start the survey. Once you're done with the survey, turn it in to me. You can keep the consent information sheet.

Appendix C: Consent Information Sheet

CONSENT INFORMATION SHEET

Identity Development of Somali College Students

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study that examines the identity development of Somali college students.

This study is being conducted by: Jamal Adam, PhD candidate in Higher Education, College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The purpose of this study is to understand your identity development and how campus experiences impacted the development of your identity. There are no wrong answers but rather how do you see yourself and how do you see the on campus experiences that influenced your identity. The results of this study will contribute university understand the experiences of Somali college students so it can serve them in ways that promotes their growth and success as students.

PROCEDURES

I selected you for this interview because you are a student of Somali descent at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. You will be asked to provide your demographic information in a one page form and participate in the following activities: one 60 minute interview. The interview will be audio-taped to insure accuracy of the information provided. The interview will be followed by a brief demographic survey that will two minutes.

The data collected by the Investigator will not contain any identifying information or any link back to you or your participation in this study. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: no identifying information will be requested of the participants by the Investigator.

RISKS AND BENEFITS TO BEING IN THIS STUDY

Participation in this study involves no known risk. Also, your responses and identity will remain strictly confidential. You can decline to answer any question.

This study will help university faculty, staff, administration and students increase their knowledge about identity formation of Somali American college students, and possibly

lead to increase in support and accommodations to Somalis and other immigrants receive on college campuses. There are no direct benefits to you for participation in this study.

COMPENSATION

There is a compensation involved with this study: gift card of $20 value.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept confidential. No identifying information will be collected in any of the information asked in this survey. Furthermore, no information will be included in any published report that would make it possible to identify you. Only the researchers involved with this study will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, you may contact Jamal Adam via email at adam0426@umn.edu or by phone at (612) 987-6627. Professor Jarrett Gupton is the student's advisor and can be reached by email at **gupton@umn**.edu or by phone at (612) 625-1896.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, contact Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

Agreement:

I have read the procedures described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure of this research and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant:_____Date:_____

Principal Investigator: _____Date:_____

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Appendix D: Individual Interview Protocol

The interview protocol question explore how Somali college students' interactions with the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's social-ecology model shaped the development of their identity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The structure and phrasing of questions follow Charmaz's format of grounded theory interview questions which proceed on an arch where in-depth interview is divided into "initial," "intermediate," and "ending" questions (Charmaz, 2014).

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Again, the purpose of this interview is to help me understand how Somali college students see themselves and form their identity.

1. Please tell me about a little bit about yourself?
    - Tell me how did you come to be a student at the University of Minnesota?
2. Tell me five words that describe what about what it means to be a Somali mean to you?
    - What these words mean to you?
    - Tell me about a time when being Somali played a role in how you see yourself?
    - How has your views, if it all, of being Somali changed?
3. To what extent are you connected to Somalia and how has that shaped who you are?
    - How do your feeling thinking about Somalia shape the person you are today?
    - How does this affect how you see yourself as an American?
4. What do you think about race?
    - When, if at all, did you first notice this?
5. Is being Black and Somali mean the same to you?
    - How do you balance those two identities?
6. Tell me what role your religion or spirituality play in your life as a Somali college student?
    - How did that change?
7. Describe does your gender impact your daily life as a Somali college student?
8. Who are you closest in your family?
    - How did the family shape you?
9. Where did you grow up? Describe to me what was that like?
    - How has that shaped who you are?
    - How does the wider society view you?
        - Tell me a positive impact and negative impact this had on you?
10. What does it mean to be a Somali college student at the University of Minnesota?
    - How do you describe your interactions with students, staff and faculty?
    - Were these positive or negative interactions?
    - How these interactions affected or influenced you?
11. Tell me how your perception of who you are and identity has changed by the experience of being college student?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix E: Demographic Information Protocol

Sex: _____female _____male

Name:

Age: (in years) _____

Ethnic background: _____

Were you born in the United States? Yes____ No____

If you were born outside the United States, how long have you lived in the United States? (in years) _____

Degree sought: ___Bachelor ___Master ___PhD/EdD ___Professional

Major: _____

Chosen career: _____

Are you a member of a student associations?

If so, which ones?_____

_____